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Political Agency and the Symbolic Legacy of Authoritarian Regimes:

The Case of Libya

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Declaration of Authenticity

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work of research. This thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made. Moreover, this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university, and is less than 80,000 words in length.

Kawther Nuri Alfasi, Oxford
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Abstract

This thesis examines the emergence of contentious forms of political agency during the Libyan uprising of 2011. The wave of popular protests known as the ‘Arab Spring’ challenged prevailing assumptions about the politics of the region. It was argued that, through their unfettered, claims making practices, Arab publics had undermined authoritarian structures of power, and become imbued with new, empowering self-understandings. Positioning itself within this literature on Middle East politics, the thesis sets out to analyse authoritarianism as a mode of domination, and to investigate the extent to which moments of radical contestation both transform authoritarian regimes and generate new political subjectivities. The analysis is centred on the Libyan uprising, which emerged under Qadhafi’s authoritarian *Jamahiriya*, yet witnessed widespread protests, civil activism and an armed conflict from February to August 2011.

The thesis integrates multi-institutional politics theory with theories of contentious politics in order to conceptualise domination as located in social ‘institutions’ that are simultaneously material and symbolic. In turn, it understands agency as a strategic and symbolic representational practice that is capable of transforming institutional structures. Drawing on interviews with Libyan activists, and on the analysis of social movement discourses, the thesis advances three core arguments. Firstly, it argues that Qadhafi’s *Jamahiriya* embedded political agency into its system of domination by engendering complicity. Secondly, it argues that in 2011, Libyans undercut the *Jamahiriya*’s monopoly over meaning and practice by generating mobilising ‘collective action frames’, and by subverting its symbolic and classificatory schemas. Lastly, it indicates that representational practices ultimately struggled to transform authoritarian domination because they were bound up with the strategic logics of collective action, and because they re-inscribed the *Jamahiriya*’s definitions of power and collectivity.

In proffering these arguments, this thesis generates a new body of empirical material on an understudied case, and critically applies, challenges and extends theories of authoritarianism and contentious politics.

List of Acronyms

BPC	Basic Popular Congress
GPC	General People's Congress
ICC	International Criminal Court
LLHR	Libyan League of Human Rights
LYC	Libya Youth Centre
LYM	Libyan Youth Movement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NEDB	National Economic Development Board
NTC	National Transitional Council
NFSL	National Front for the Salvation of Libya
PPT	Political Process Theory
RCC	Revolutionary Command Council
RST	Rentier State Theory
RYC	Revolutionary Youth Commission
TCD	Temporary Constitutional Declaration
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council

Introduction

This thesis examines the emergence of political agency as a strategic and symbolic representational practice during the 2011 Libyan uprising. Drawing on multi-institutional theories of power and society, it argues that Colonel Muammar al-Qadhafi's authoritarian regime, the '*Jamahiriya*', enmeshed popular political agency within its system of domination. In turn, the Libyan uprising shifted these power dynamics: it led to the emergence of collective meaning making practices, in which Libyans mobilised against, and subverted, the *Jamahiriya*'s behavioural norms and classification schemes. However, I qualify the voluntaristic implications of this argument by indicating the ways in which this mode of articulation was constrained by the logics of collective action, and by the *Jamahiriya*'s symbolic ordering of reality. The thesis thus presents a critical appraisal of the oft-reiterated claim that, during the 'Arab Spring', 'the will of the people [was] expressed without intermediary' (Achcar 2013: 1).¹

This chapter will signal the importance of 'political agency' as a concept in contemporary social and cultural theory, distinguishing it from more conventional terms such as 'political participation'. Framing a research agenda in terms of 'agency' is a particularly pertinent undertaking in light of the demonstrations and protests that took place in the Arab world from late 2010, and which saw the overthrow of

¹ The term 'Arab Spring' has been much popularised by Western and Arab media, and has entered the research lexicon. The thesis uses it to refer to the mass protests and uprisings that occurred across the Arab region from the end of 2010 onwards, but it does so sparingly, in recognition of the fact that it remains a contested term (Ahmary and Wedday 2012; Pappé 2014; Monier 2015; Cherkaoui 2016).

dictatorships by societies that had been described as ‘powerless’ and demobilized (Barakat 1993: 26). It is all the more compelling in a case such as Libya, which experienced mass mobilisation despite being characterised as a ‘depoliticized’ society under Qadhafi’s authoritarian regime (Vandewalle 2006: 71). This chapter will situate the research question of the thesis within the literature on Middle East politics, as it has variously conceptualised and studied both political agency and authoritarianism. It will go on to outline the theoretical and empirical contributions of the research, and to clarify its conceptual and methodological underpinnings. Lastly, it will delineate the scope and structure of the remaining chapters.

1.1 Why Study Political Agency? Why Authoritarianism?

The concept of political agency has attracted much scholarly attention within the field of political sociology. Divergent assessments of the respective roles of ‘agency’ and ‘structure’ in shaping political outcomes have ‘haunted social theory from the start’ (Elyachar 2014: 453) and have long been debated in studies of contentious politics (Giddens 1976, 1981; Wendt 1987; Sewell 1992; McAdam et al 1996; Klandermans et al 1998; Goodwin and Jasper 1999, 2004; Whittier 2002; Polletta 1999). More recently, scholars have argued that there are significant transformations in ‘political actorness’ in today’s public arena (Marchetti 2013: 1). Such transformations include new forms of action such as ‘political consumerism’ that are targeted at private organisations (Stolle et al 2005; Teorell 2007), new opportunities for political engagement enabled by the media (from the television to the internet), and new transnational, globalised contexts through which actors can influence the political

system (Eschle 2005; Stahler-Shalk et al 2007; Barnett 2013; Davis et al 2013; Arbatli and Rosenberg 2017).

This emergent, theoretical investigation of political agency can be contrasted with the predominant mode of analysis in political science, which has traditionally avoided expanding the study of ‘what “doing” politics means in the present context’, beyond actions anchored in state structures and domestic political institutions (Marchetti 2013: 1). Within the comparative political science literature, the agency of citizens has been examined through the framework of ‘political participation’, defined as activity that is specifically designed to influence the sphere of governmental decision-making (Verba and Nie 1972; Huntington and Nelson 1976; Conge 1988). In practice, studying political participation has entailed the identification and measurement of observable political activities in Western liberal democracies, such as voting, campaigning and contacting public officials (Pateman 1970; Barnes and Kaase 1979; Peterson 1990; Erikson et al 2002). Such activities purportedly sustain democratic governance, build civic competence and enable citizen membership and investment in political life (Scaff 1975; Putnam 1993, 2000; Munroe 2002; Cooper 2005).

There have undoubtedly been attempts within the comparative politics literature to expand upon and question this understanding of political participation as civic engagement (Schmitter and Karl 1991; Moehler 2008; Berger 2009). One strand of literature has de-emphasised the political participation of the masses, and its supposed democracy-building virtues, by developing an elite-centred analysis of democratic governance and political change (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Higley and Burton 1989, 2006; Higley et al 1990; Dye and Zeigler 1996). Alternately, some scholars have sought to describe and account for newly emergent forms of political activity in

established democracies, through concepts such as ‘unconventional political participation’ (Booth and Seligson 1978; Marsh and Kaase 1979; Muller 1982; Dalton 2008; Bourne 2010; Quaranta 2012; Lamprianou 2013), which includes illegal and violent activities, and ‘latent political participation’ (Ekman and Amna 2012) which refers to non-overtly ‘political activities’ occurring beyond formal democratic channels. Although such studies have considerable value in questioning an idealised and homogenous interpretation of democratic governance, the investigation of agency ultimately continues to be rooted in institutional and state-centric understandings of the political sphere.

A more expansive understanding of political agency has been articulated in studies of contentious politics. Scholars who have invoked political agency as a research agenda have suggested that to do so entails ‘going beyond’ the prevailing paradigms of political science research. It involves going beyond the conventional study of ‘politics’, or ‘how authoritative decisions are made and executed for a society’ (Easton 1957: 383), to encompassing an awareness of ‘the political’ as a terrain of contentious struggle over established power relations, undertaken by people themselves (Scott 1990; Rubin 1996; Haugaard 1997; Knauer 1980; Nash 2001; Hauptmann 2004; Mouffe 2005; Featherstone 2008; Lyons 2010). It involves going beyond the assumption that political authority resides in the physical dissemination of resources (Dye and Zeigler 1996: 2) to recognising that environments are symbolic as well as physical, shaped by communication, social interaction and classificatory practices (Heller and Jones 2013). Lastly, it demands that we view political action, not simply as a rational undertaking, but as comprising the building of group solidarities, shared relations and changes in political subjectivities (Buechler 1993; Polletta and

Jasper 2001; Eschle and Maiguashca 2005; Bayat 2010; Maiguashca 2013; Juris and Sitrin 2016).

This thesis situates its study of political agency in light of this expanded conceptualisation of political actorness. These understandings of political agency have largely been elaborated within contemporary institutional, cultural and social theory, but political agency has also emerged as a point of enquiry in the Middle East politics literature, in light of a need to explain and account for the ‘Arab Spring’ (Dupont and Passy 2011; Gause 2011; Goodwin 2011; Elman 2012). The demonstrations and protests that broke out in the Middle East, ushered in by the self-immolation of the Tunisian street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi on 17 December 2010, were not only a palpable demonstration of ‘political participation’, but of agentive traits that are more subjective and even laudable: fearlessness and empowerment, a newfound capacity to articulate popular demands, and a consciousness that it is possible to alter authoritarian conditions through collective action (Gamson 2011; Pollack 2011a; Bellin 2012b; Brynen et al 2012; Cavatorta and Pace 2012; Lynch 2012; Dawisha 2013; Tripp 2013; Elyachar 2014). The emergence of this new, collective spirit of political action was cited as evidence that, despite having seemingly countenanced authoritarian regimes for decades, Arab publics were not passive or politically apathetic (Hudson 2011; Durac 2012; Achcar 2013).

This analysis of the Arab uprisings appears to validate a key concept in social theory: what James Scott (1990: 203) has described as ‘flash-in-the-pan’ moments of open contestation, or what have elsewhere been referred to as ‘historical watershed’ moments of change (Sewell 1999: 52) and ‘moments of madness...events in which the wall between the instrumental and the expressive collapses’ (Zolberg 1972: 183). Such moments of open political contestation purportedly enable individuals to

recapture their ‘human dignity’, and to reconfigure the authoritative meanings and classifications that shape their lives (Scott 1990: 208). Yet, it soon appeared that the Arab Spring had yielded a ‘depressingly modest harvest’, at least in terms of its impact on political governance (Brownlee et al 2015: 5), with only Tunisia maintaining a democratic transition out of the six countries that experienced regime-challenging protests, and the region as a whole witnessing a limited shift in civil and political liberties. As Brownlee et al (2015: 211) go on to argue, ‘the idea that the self-immolation of a frustrated fruitseller in a dusty Tunisian backwater could change the fundamental nature of Arab politics seems remarkably quaint, even naïve’.

Consequently, the literature has refocused its attention away from the radical moment of contention in 2011, signalling the need to go ‘beyond the Arab Spring’ (Kamrava 2014) and towards delineating the historical roots of authoritarian stability and political change in the region (Gana 2013; Rand 2013; Badran 2014; Hinnebusch 2014; Bamert 2015; Hess 2016; Roberts 2016). Nevertheless, the notion of an emergent political agency in the Arab uprisings remains a key area of investigation, and the scholarly allusions to this phenomenon in the immediate aftermath of the protests have raised a number of unanswered questions. What were the characteristics of the political agency that emerged in 2011? How did such this new form of ‘political actorness’ contest dominant – in this instance, authoritarian - configurations of power? And to what extent did it transform political subjectivities? This enquiry is formulated into the central research question of the thesis:

How, and to what extent, did open insubordination in the Arab Spring transform authoritarian structures of domination and generate new political subjectivities?

1.2 Political Agency and the Libyan Uprising of 2011

The Arab uprisings saw six countries experience regime challenging protests (Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen), and other demonstrations of varying intensity in Morocco, Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, and Sudan. In the midst of these cases, the Libyan uprising presents a particularly absorbing and under-investigated conundrum. Popularly dubbed the ‘17 February Revolution’, the Libyan uprising began on 15 February 2011, culminating in the capture of the city of Sirte and the death of Muammar al-Qadhafi on 20 October 2011. The uprising was a complicated instance of popular political mobilisation: it was initiated through the kind of large-scale, peaceful demonstrations that were witnessed across the Arab world, before transforming into an armed insurrection supported by NATO intervention. Nevertheless, in the new rhetoric of the Libyan media in 2011, the uprising was portrayed as a decidedly popular, political undertaking, accomplished by Libyans themselves:

There was the old Libya, its people oppressed, its wealth stolen, its creativity obliterated, its security lost...and the Libya of 17 February. This Libya is the present and future at once. It has created its own glory due to its revolutionary youth. It is building its own reality through the efforts of its sons, and it derives its strength from the history of its forefathers. And it is Libya as we have always wanted it, and as we see it and feel it: a free, civic state, preserving the dignity of its people, with institutions, a constitution and security. There is no place in it for terrorism or exclusionary slogans, or the suppression of voices ever again.²

² Agela, Awad. “There is a difference” (*tham ’mata farq*). *Al-Manarah*. 29 July 2011. Issue 6: 8.

The language is utopian but also present-oriented, depicting tangible practices of state building and seeing in such activities the emergence of a new form of civic consciousness in Libya. Following the rise of a civil society sphere in Libya, particularly in the city of Benghazi, and the election of a 200-member General National Congress (GNC) in July 2012, this language was paralleled in optimistic, scholarly assessments of the political trajectory of the Libyan uprising (Vandewalle 2012a). It was argued that ‘the ouster of Gadafi and the success of the revolution have brought the majority of Libyans closer together and reinforced their sense of national identity’ (Deeb 2012: 77), and that ‘the Libyan people soundly rejected the authoritarian model that had plagued the country for centuries’ (St. John 2014: 137). In turn, the international media hailed the success of the National Forces Alliance in the 2012 elections as a success by liberal, secularist forces (Mezran and Knecht 2015: 94), suggesting that the country was en-route to a successful democratic transition.

The rapid emergence of new, participatory forms of political action in Libya is particularly striking in light of the despotic authoritarian government of Muammar al-Qadhafi, who had ruled for more than four decades after overthrowing the constitutional monarchy of King Idris I in a bloodless coup d’état in 1969. Unlike other authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, which have been characterised as ‘liberalized autocracies’, Qadhafi banned political parties, trade unions and NGOs, and civil society did not exist in any form (Joffé 2006: 117). Following the establishment of the *Jamahiriya* (‘State of the Masses’) in 1977, Qadhafi instated a structure of political governance that was purportedly based on the direct rule of the masses. In reality, political authority was informally embodied in Qadhafi and his inner circle, who was technically outside of the political system and therefore unaccountable (Pargeter 2006: 226). As a result, it has been argued that Libyan

society was thoroughly depoliticised, ‘unable to contemplate or express any ideas beyond those espoused by Qadhafi’ (Vandewalle 2015: 23). The suppression of popular self-representation under the *Jamahiriyah* has been characterised as a longstanding feature of Libya’s social and political development, stemming from the fact that Libyan land has been ‘invaded, occupied and administered by foreign powers since the beginning of recorded history’ (St. John 2014: 123), and propounded in particular by Italian colonial rule in the twentieth century, which saw the destruction of local bureaucracy and the failure to create any institutions of representative government (Davis 1987: 58).

Libya, as it has been researched thus far, presents a number of gaps pertaining to political agency. It has been argued that, under the *Jamahiriyah*, Libyans simply ‘learned to cope with a political system they had no chance of reforming’ (Vandewalle 2006: 129), but the nature of ‘coping’ as a mode of political disengagement has not been unpacked in the scholarly literature on Libya. Moreover, there is a need to account for the sharp contrast between the purportedly depoliticised and apathetic Libyan society under Qadhafi, and the dynamic, vigorous and agentive Libyan society of the 2011 uprising. Lastly, there is a need to reconcile the politically engaged Libyan society of the uprising, with its rhetoric of a transformed political consciousness, with the fragmented Libyan political sphere following the uprising, with its fast-diminishing practice of civil resistance as a viable means of protest (Joffé 2016: 136).

The recent, burgeoning literature on Libya has chosen to contextualise the Libyan uprising, principally by focusing on post-revolutionary power struggles and on the structural factors underpinning political instability in the country (Serwer 2011; Lacher 2013a; Pack 2013; Sawani and Pack 2013; Cole and McQuinn 2015; Mezran

and Knecht 2015; Pack and Cook 2015; Randall 2015; Geha and Volpi 2016; Szczepankiewicz-Rudzka 2016; Willcoxon 2017). Within this literature, there have been some valuable discussions focusing on the phenomenon of civil resistance during the Libyan uprising itself (Joffé 2013, 2016; Khatib 2013b; Khalil 2014; Cherstich 2014; Rajabany and Shitrit 2014; Roberts 2016). However, these texts have largely described and celebrated modes of contentious activity without theoretically exploring the emergence of political agency as an open, representational practice under authoritarianism.

This thesis aims to contribute to the literature on Middle East politics by engaging with the interrelationship between political agency and authoritarian modes of domination. Firstly, it makes a contribution to the way in which authoritarianism has been studied by taking the Libyan *Jamahiriya* seriously as an ‘institution’: a dominant configuration of power comprised of both material and symbolic technologies of control, that shaped and constituted publically political subjectivities prior to the Libyan uprising. Secondly, it contributes to our understanding of ‘political agency’ in the Arab uprisings by unpacking the ways in which political actors actively articulated their claims against the Qadhafi regime. This representational activity is analysed as a ‘meaning making practice...the subjective process of conceptualising the world around us’ (Packer 2010: 52). In turn, the thesis also draws attention to the way in which this process of meaning making, not only negotiated and subverted, but also ultimately reinforced dominant constructions of reality. Lastly, through integrating complementary insights from various theories of contentious politics, it critically engages with the fundamental premises of social movement theory, noting a tension in its formulation of political agency as a phenomenon that is both strategic and expressive.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

This thesis seeks to understand the way in which political agency emerges in relation to an authoritarian configuration of power. This point of enquiry necessitates a theoretical framework that can account for structural domination and change, but that also sees structure and agency as mutually implicating. The resultant theoretical framework, which is outlined in Chapter 3, draws on multi-institutional politics theory in order to understand the way in which power shapes meanings and is constitutive of political subjectivities. The theoretical framework also draws on theories of social movement activism and resistance, in order to account for the way in which political actors can contest and potentially transform dominant meanings through their representational practices. These theories are complementary in that they emphasise the significance of definitional, classificatory practices in shaping the symbolic and material sphere, irrespective of whether this discursive power is deployed by dominant or subordinate groups.

The multi-institutional politics model argues that society is comprised of multiple ‘institutions’ that order reality through a combination of material and symbolic technologies of domination (Douglas 1986; Friedland and Alford 1991; Thornton and Ocasio 1999, 2008; Polletta 2004; Armstrong and Bernstein 2008). An institution is thus defined as an ordering of reality, or as a ‘supraorganizational pattern of activity’ that contains a symbolic system of meaning (Friedland and Alford 1991: 243). Customarily in political science, the state has been seen as the most powerful social institution, with a particularly potent capacity to create new social categories, and an ability to shape the environment more profoundly than any other organisation (Polletta 2004: 165). However, Friedland and Alford (1991: 238) argue that in a

multi-institutional model, the centrality of the state as an institution is historically variable, and should not be taken for granted. Other social institutions that are of importance include the family, schools, and mass media (Valocchi 2005b: 756).

The concept of an ‘institution’ is particularly expansive, and should not be conflated with the use of the term ‘political institutions’, which largely refers to structures that create, enforce and apply government policies within a given type of regime (Sandberg and Lundberg 2012). An institutional understanding of domination involves going beyond the definition of power as a primarily material force, to one where it involves the dissemination of meaning systems, normative structures and categorisations of identity, value and interest in society (Valocchi 2005b: 751).

Through this combined material and discursive power, also known as an ‘institutional logic’ (Thornton and Ocasio 1999), institutions can exert a powerful, even ‘invisible’, hold on our processes of classifying and recognising (Douglas 1986; Valocchi 2005b). As a result, individuals will tend to reproduce the symbolic order of a given institution, and may even come to believe in its definitional structures altogether (Friedland and Alford 1991: 250), thereby becoming self-regulating subjects (Foucault 1977, 1980).

This thesis understands authoritarian regimes as ‘institutions’. Authoritarian rule has been defined as one in which there is a concentration of power, limited political pluralism, limited political participation, and the predominance of patrimonial governance (Purcell 1973; Moore 1974). Beyond this broad definition, it is commonly argued that authoritarian rule comes in many forms, with some regimes relying on the coercive repression of internal dissent in order to sustain their authority, and others deploying a range of different strategies including co-optation and divide and rule (Svolik 2009, 2012; Wright and Escribà-Folch 2011; Cavatorta 2013; Wahman et al

2013; Geddes et al 2014; Sassoon 2016). In addition to managing political dissent through material practices, however, authoritarian regimes also control and manage systems of signification. Although, as indicated above, all dominant configurations of power attempt to manage meanings, authoritarian rulers deploy this strategy extensively and as a ‘disciplinary device’, through which they are able to ‘enforce obedience and sustain the conditions under which regimes rule’ (Wedeen 1999: 5-6).

A focus on authoritarian ‘regimes’ as the central unit of analysis, as opposed to ‘states’ or even ‘systems’, is particularly well suited to an institutional understanding of authoritarianism. A ‘regime’ has been defined as an ‘ensemble of patterns’ (Schmitter and Karl 1991: 76) or an ‘ensemble of rules’ (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 65), formal and informal, that actors anticipate others to abide by in the process of gaining access to power, choosing leaders and policies and exercising authority (Kailitz 2013: 39). As a method of organising relations between ruler and ruled, the concept of a regime is connotative of dominant power dynamics, but it also suggests a socially-reinforcing system of authority, with scholars arguing that such patterns must be ‘habitually known, practiced, and accepted by most, if not all, actors’ (Schmitter and Karl 1991: 76). The concept of a regime, like the concept of an institution, implies that structure and agency are mutually implicating in the process of sustaining power. Moreover, the term ‘regime’ is not overly specialised. It has been argued that regimes create ‘rules of the game’, and that actors can manoeuvre in accordance with them (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986), but the content of such rules or the way in which they function in practice is not built into the concept itself.

In contrast, the concept of a state is tightly circumscribed: states are ‘sets of political, military, judicial and bureaucratic organizations that exert political authority and coercive control over people living within the borders of well-defined territories’

(Amenta et al 2002: 49). The investigation of states has been described as the central task of political science (Ishiyama and Breuning 2011: 5), and yet it has also been argued that 'the state' is merely one kind of political structure that is both time and culture-bound (Evans 1970: 119). Moreover, the analysis of state power in relation to contentious political action has generally focused on the role played by democratic institutions within advanced capitalist countries (Rucht 1996; McAdam et al 2001; Smith and Fetner 2010), as opposed to authoritarian contexts. In turn, the concept of a 'political system' (Easton 1957, 1965) is useful in suggesting the interconnectedness of a dominant ordering of reality, but its conceptualisation of political life is similarly restricted, centering on 'how authoritative decisions are made and executed for a society' through the operation of political institutions such as parties, interests groups, government and voting (Easton 1957: 383).

An institutional understanding of authoritarian regimes is particularly useful for grasping the mechanisms of structural domination, but it is less clear on how individual actors can transform the meanings that order their lives. Institutions, it is argued, engender an 'embedded' form of agency (Thornton and Ocasio 2008: 104): individuals can 'transpose' institutional meanings in order to further their own interests and to articulate their identities (Sewell 1992: 18-21), but they will generally reproduce institutional authority through their social practices (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008: 83). Moreover, the notion that institutional classifications reproduce 'belief in the institution' (Friedland and Alford 1991: 250) does not fully accommodate social practices of dissimulation in authoritarian contexts (Wedeen 1999). It is suggested that transformative moments of 'institutional struggle' can allow individuals to reconfigure dominant definitions of power and interest (Friedland

and Alford 1991: 250), but the theory does not delineate specific theoretical tools for investigating this process of contestation.

As a result, and in order to understand agency as a meaning making practice that is capable of reinterpreting and transforming classificatory systems and practices, the thesis draws upon social movement framing theory and resistance theory. Both theories are fundamentally concerned with the way in which political actors engage in the social construction of reality, and both have conceptualised agency as a contentious representational capacity. The divergence is in their differentiated emphasis on the purposes and outcomes of such meaning making practices.

Framing theory suggests that meaning making practices principally serve a strategic, mobilising purpose for a particular cause (McAdam et al 1996; Oliver and Johnston 2005; Johnston 2009; Doerr et al 2015). By articulating, packaging and re-interpreting their motivations and grievances, actors can develop ‘collective action frames’ that redefine the socio-political context of action in strategically congenial ways (Snow et al 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; Gamson 1992; Laraña et. al 1994; Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Carroll and Ratner 1996; Davis 2002; Miceli 2005). Resistance theories suggest that, through openly contentious meaning making practices, individuals can reconfigure the dominant, symbolic structures of power that organise their lives (Sewell 1999; Hollander and Einwohner 2004; Jefferess 2008; Maiguashca 2013; Tripp 2013; Juris and Sitrin 2016) and transform their own understandings of themselves as publically political persons (Spivak 1988; Scott 1990; Kurik 2016). In line with the principle that moments of open contention break the wall between the instrumental and the expressive (Zolberg 1972: 183), I position this two-pronged understanding of political agency as internally coherent, rather than contradictory. Indeed, it has been argued that dichotomies of identity vs. interest and

rationality vs. emotion fail to reflect the way in which these orientations can and do exist within the same contentious movement (Eschle 2005: 20; Armstrong and Bernstein 2008: 85; Marchetti 2013: 3).

Lastly, the theoretical framework emphasises the importance of critically reflecting on the fluid and reciprocal relationship between power and subversion, in accordance with the influential argument that resistance is ‘never in a position of exteriority in relation to power’ (Foucault 1978: 95-96). In practice, this means that scholars should actively pay attention to the ways in which subversive discourses are inflected with new hierarchies and lines of exclusion (Vesser 1989; Abu-Lughod 1990; Sharp et al 2000; Maiguashca 2013; Winegar 2016). As argued by Courpasson and Vallas (2016: 5), ‘When subordinate groups or classes defy their overseers, they often do so in ways that exercise power over groups and classes even more powerless than themselves – and they often do so in ways that are inflected with racial, gender, religious and ethnic hierarchies’. This thesis adopts this critical orientation in its evaluation of the extent to which discursive practices transformed – as opposed to simply subverted – the Qadhafi regime’s system of signification.

1.4 Research Methods and Reflexivity

The theoretical framework outlined above enabled me to disaggregate the central research question of the thesis into three distinct nodes of enquiry:

1. How did the *Jamahiriya* operate as an institution, and how did it shape popular political agency prior to the uprising?
2. How did political actors in the 2011 Libyan uprising engage in strategic, meaning making practices in their mobilisation against the Qadhafi regime?

3. How did meaning making practices subvert the Qadhafi regime's symbolic order, and to what extent did they transform it?

In order to answer these questions, this thesis deploys a range of qualitative research methods aimed at unpacking dominant and subversive semiotic practices in Libya. To that end, I analysed primary and secondary source materials on the Qadhafi regime, from cultural productions – such as Qadhafi's speeches, official regime music and iconography, and sanctioned television comedies – to extensive reports on Libyan public sector administration that were commissioned by the Qadhafi regime in 2007. I also gathered and coded a selection of social movement materials, from activist statements, social media texts and YouTube footage, official documents, newspaper articles, and revolutionary cultural productions such as music, poetry and artwork, in order to understand the way in which political actors constructed and framed their motivations for action within the political and symbolic context of the Libyan uprising. In this vein, 'digitalized stories of revolt' are increasingly useful for reflecting people's perceptions, and to some degree, their motivations for engaging in contentious action (Leenders 2013: 283).

Alongside this textual analysis, I also conducted 31 semi-structured interviews with political activists and opposition figures who participated in the Libyan uprising, many of whom set out to explicitly communicate and reframe the motives and objectives of the Libyan uprising to internal and external audiences in 2011. These interviews were designed to gather a range of perspectives on the expressive and strategic components of political activism in 2011, by actors who were based both inside Libya and in the diaspora during the uprising. They also re-channelled the interpretation of textual materials in unanticipated directions, raising insights into the way in which power operated in Qadhafi's *Jamahiriya*, and enabling me to question

the way in which the aftereffects of activism shape the subjectivities of political actors. The interviews were supplemented with secondary material from the strong body of research that emerged in the immediate aftermath of the Libyan uprising, prior to the outbreak of a civil war in 2014, which largely sheds light on the political perspectives of the formal Libyan opposition in 2011 (Chorin 2012; Sawani 2012, 2013; Benotman et al 2013; Sawani and Pack 2013; Cole and McQuinn 2015), but which also explores some dimensions of civil society activism during the uprising (Khalil 2014; Rajabany and Shitrit 2014; Strakes 2016).

The research methods used in this thesis have been triangulated in order to capture the intersection between actors' representational practices in 2011, as reflected in social movement documents and materials, and actors' contextualisation and subjective evaluation of these practices. In addition, these methods have also been deployed in a reflexive way, once again reflecting the constructivist orientations of this research. The concept of 'reflexivity' draws attention to the researcher's role in the emergent process of critical enquiry, and suggests that researchers invariably enter into a dialogic relation with the problems, the people and the contexts that they investigate (O'Connor 2015). As a result, the personal assumptions, biases or prejudices of the researcher cannot be eradicated in the pursuit of value-free reliability and neutrality (Shacklock and Smyth 1998). Instead, research is actively enriched when researchers self-reflect upon 'its location, its subjects, its process, its theoretical context, its data, its analysis, and recognize that the construction of knowledge takes place in the world and not apart from it' (Ruby 1980: 154).

Confronting our subjectivity as researchers has been described as particularly unavoidable in studies of 'resistance' against oppressive forces. This topic implies and even engenders a moral investment on the part of the researcher. As argued by

Hollander and Einwohner (2004: 550-551), ‘writing about resistance signals political solidarity with the oppressed and downtrodden; it permits the writer to choose sides in the power struggles that are interwoven with social life’. Indeed, it has even been argued that resistance is an ‘epistemological stance’ by researchers that ‘recognizes the individual and collective, embodied and spoken desire, pain, inquiry and lust for justice...[it] offers a lens for social analysis, engaged pedagogy and organizing’ (Fine et al 2014: 54). The study of resistance is here presented as inseparable from the struggles for progressive social change that are purportedly at the heart of resistance itself. However, this avowed recognition of scholarly subjectivity, as much as it fosters self-conscious research practices, must avoid risking what some scholars have described as a ‘romanticizing’ (Abu-Lughod 1990) and ‘fetishizing’ (Kellner 1995) of resistance. In practice, it must not prevent researchers, having committed to this stance of scholarly solidarity, from implementing the theoretical maxim that contentious meaning making practices should be examined for their exclusionary as well as subversive qualities.

Throughout the cycle of researching, writing and restructuring this thesis, I was acutely conscious of the way in which my own experiences as a Libyan, and of the Libyan uprising, shaped my assumptions, research methods, and interpretive proclivities. I imported into the research process my own recollections of the Qadhafi regime, from the enforced re-performance of its propaganda while studying in a weekend ‘Libyan school’ in the UK, to witnessing the intersection of fear and dissimulation that characterised public speech about the Qadhafi regime in my visits to the country. The Libyan uprising ushered in a further set of personal experiences: participation in political activism, exposure to the sentiment of overwhelming collectivity, and the consumption of revolutionary cultural productions. These

recollections became points of entry into my research, shaping the types of interview questions I directed, but also signalling shared familiarities with the experiences of Libyan activists, and therefore at times blurring the line between interview and conversation.

In addition, my experiences of the Libyan uprising had generated a set of beliefs and assumptions about the progressive and empowering nature of revolutionary activism. During the process of research, some of these assumptions came to the fore and were challenged through interviews with Libyan activists, many of whom were avowedly disillusioned with their revolutionary experiences, or were actively attempting to re-contextualise and make sense of the fleeting, ‘abnormal euphoria that accompanies revolution’ (Jones 2012: 5). The insights that arose from these discussions were in turn rechanneled and directed as questions in subsequent interviews.

As a result, interviews were not simply a unidirectional means of eliciting information, but critical and dialogic reflections on both the affirmative and dispiriting aspects of political contention. During this recursive activity, there was undoubtedly a challenge in drawing attention to actors’ self-understandings and representations of reality, while simultaneously remaining at a critical, interpretive distance; of being reflexive, but without muting the voices of participants (Edwards and Ribbens 1998: 204). The study by Jessica Winegar (2016) on acts of aesthetic ordering during the Egyptian uprising was particularly helpful in delineating a way in which scholars can represent the agentic practices of activists while attending to the hierarchies and power dynamics that they engender.

1.5 Chapter Outline

This thesis is organised into eight chapters, including the Introduction. The following chapter reviews the literature on Middle East politics as it has variously conceptualised and investigated the phenomenon of political agency under authoritarianism, prior to and in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. It highlights the central strengths of this literature: its emphasis on the heterogeneity of authoritarian regimes types, its close examination of the way in which authoritarian institutions and structures of governance shape the orientations, interests and behaviours of domestic political actors, and occasionally, its exploration of non-institutionalised forms and vehicles of political participation in the region. The research question emerges based on the central gaps in this literature: namely, its relatively sparse attention to the symbolic practises of domination undertaken by authoritarian regimes, and its insufficient exploration of the way in which political actors can subvert and reconstitute - during moments of open contestation - the meanings that structure their lives.

Chapter 3 outlines the conceptual framework of the thesis. It begins by mapping out and critically engaging with theories that have conceptualised the nature of political agency under a dominant social structure. It extends the above discussion by touching on another prominent theory of contentious politics, political process theory (PPT), and by elaborating on the divergences and commonalities of multi-institutional politics theory, social movement theory and theories of resistance. Complementary insights from these three bodies of scholarship are integrated into one theoretical model that conceives of structure as both semiotic and material, and of structure and agency as mutually implicating forces. Chapter 4 describes the methodology of the

thesis. It justifies the selection of Libya as a case study of authoritarianism, noting the extent to which it both resembles but differs substantively from other authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. It delineates the constructivist and interpretivist methodological orientation of the thesis, the specific research methods that were used, and issues pertaining to ethics and validity.

The three central, empirical chapters of the thesis each answer one of the research questions outlined above. Chapter 5 traces the Qadhafi regime's 'institutional logic' as it was established through material (coercive and political) and symbolic structures of power. It outlines the way in which the *Jamahiriya* regularised behaviour by engendering 'complicity': enforcing popular participation in its political-administrative system, and mandating the public re-performance of its symbols and rituals. Abiding with the *Jamahiriya*'s institutional logic fundamentally centred on upholding its contradictory and incommensurate claims: in particular, the substantive gap between what it professed in theory and the way in which it operated in practice. This contradiction, however, also supplied opportunities for agency, enabling people to manoeuvre within the *Jamahiriya* in furtherance of their own interests while still abiding by its terms of public engagement.

Chapters 6 and 7 discuss the strategic and symbolic meaning making practices that emerged during the Libyan uprising. Chapter 6 outlines the central revolutionary framing outlets that emerged during the uprising, and the way in which they strategically articulated and packaged a cohesive grievance narrative designed to mobilise support for the opposition movement, and to topple the Qadhafi regime. However, the chapter also draws attention to the way in which these instrumental, collective understandings rested as much on the obfuscation of differences as they did on the clarification of meanings, and it scrutinises the implications of this tension for

political agency. In turn, Chapter 7 explores the symbolic, representational practices of the Libyan opposition movement in 2011. The chapter is structured on the theoretical premise that the transformation of a dominant system of meaning must not only consist of subversive modes of resistance, but also involve the active establishment of a more egalitarian, inclusive system of meaning. It delineates the structure and content of the revolutionary symbolic order that was generated during the uprising, and critically evaluates the way in which it altered the *Jamahiriya*'s classificatory schemas and behavioural norms. Drawing on the material and semiotic understanding of structure outlined in the theoretical framework, it also evaluates the extent to which the revolutionary rhetoric was crystallised in new modes of civic understanding and practice.

The final chapter draws together the individual arguments developed in the empirical chapters, and restates the thesis' contribution towards the literature on Middle East politics and social movement theory. The thesis' 'problematism' of political agency, and of contentious meaning making practices during the Libyan uprising, points towards a much broader need to explore the way in which authoritarian regimes shape the semiotic contexts of political activism. Nevertheless, it is important not to overextend the implications of this argument. The thesis advances one definition of political agency, focuses on intra-institutional, as opposed to inter-institutional, conflict, and does not shed light on the numerous, sub-national contexts of meaning making that emerged during the Libyan uprising. There is, however, substantive room to go beyond its preliminary observations, and to investigate, both the post-revolutionary dimensions of institutional transformation in Libya, and the way in which meaning making practices are continuing to reshape and create new narratives of revolution and self in the aftermath of the Libyan uprising.

Literature Review: Political Agency in the Middle East

2.1 Introduction

The concept of political agency has frequently surfaced in the literature on Middle East politics, at times explicitly, at others indirectly. Although this literature is heterogeneous in its theoretical and empirical underpinnings, it has consistently engaged with the concept of political agency with careful attention to the autocratic environments in which political actors operate. This chapter will begin by reviewing two broad subsets of research: the literature on liberalised autocracy and authoritarian resilience, and the literature on informal, contentious and latent political participation in the Middle East. The former body of work has emphasised the agency of ruling elites, while the latter has stressed the agentive capacity of ordinary citizens, the downtrodden and the dispossessed. However, both coalesce in pointing towards the shaping and even determinant influence that authoritarian structures have on the activities and identities of political actors.

The emergent body of research following the 2011 Arab uprisings shifted the parameters of this discourse towards the vulnerability of autocracy. The penultimate section of this chapter will delineate the way in which the literature on the Arab uprisings grappled with the sweeping display of political agency and suggested its capacity for radically reconfiguring both political subjectivities and authoritarian dynamics. The Arab uprisings, which were accompanied by a ubiquitous if brief

scholarly engagement with the concept of agency, necessitate that new questions be asked regarding the relationship between agency and authoritarianism during moments of open contestation. The chapter concludes by indicating the central research question underpinning the thesis: a question that emerges from the trajectory of the literature as a whole, as it has alternately characterised political agency in the Middle East.

2.2 Political Agency and Resilient Autocracy

The persistence of authoritarianism in the Middle East has shaped the way in which comparative political scientists have investigated political agency in the region – or indeed, been reluctant to do. The proliferation of autocracy in the Middle East situated the region outside comparative analyses of democratic systems (Duverger 1964) and beyond the Latin American and Eastern European ‘third wave’ of democratisation paradigm (Huntington 1991). Bernard Lewis (1958: 51) declared that ‘the classical West European pattern of freely-elected, multi-party legislative assemblies has been or is being abandoned’ in the Middle East. In consequence, and for a substantive period of time, relatively little was written of Middle East regimes in comparative political research (Dahl 1971; Almond et al 1978; Kavanagh and Peele 1984; Diamond et al 1988; Andrain 1994; Dogan and Kazancigil 1994; Kopstein and Lichbach 2000) and even less of popular political engagement.

The relative neglect of the Middle East partly stemmed from the underlying assumption that the region was somehow ‘exceptional’ in its resistance to democracy, either for cultural reasons (Kedourie 1992) or due to economic conditions (Crystal 1990). More commonly, however, the prevailing democratic ‘transition paradigm’

emphasised the accelerated nature of democratisation processes and outlined stringent criteria for identifying ‘consolidated democracies’ (Linz and Stepan 1996). As a result, it was not equipped for the analysis of messy and incomplete (Cavatorta and Durac 2011: 17) or ‘open-ended’ and ‘tentative’ (Sadiki 2011: 3) democratic transitions, such as were unfolding in the Arab world.

The counterpart to the ‘exceptionalism’ thesis over-emphasised nascent democratisation processes in the region, with scholars citing the growth of political parties and electoral participation in some countries as evidence to that end (Hudson 1991; Brynen et al 1995, 1998; Abukhalil 1997; Ehteshami 1999). Saad Eddin Ibrahim (1995) listed the holding of national and municipal elections in Algeria, Yemen and Jordan as evidence of ‘serious democratization processes’ and the ‘opening up’ of Arab polities, while Laith Kubba (2000: 84) argued that the growth of civil society in the region signified ‘ground for optimism about democratic prospects in the Arab world’. By focusing on the formal emergence of democratisation, such texts usefully challenge the notion of mass Arab depoliticisation, but they have less to say about the dynamics of autocracy and political agency beyond the transitology framework.

In the preceding two decades, the comparative politics literature has eschewed the democratisation paradigm, arguing that the liberalisation initiated in the 1990s had simply ushered in ‘pseudo-democracy’ and ‘new authoritarianism’ (Volpi 2004; King 2009; Albrecht 2010), that political openings came purely at the discretion of autocrats (Brownlee 2002a), and that hallmarks of democracy, such as pluralism and popular mobilisation for political reform, had in fact declined (Bellin 2004). Instead of dismissing or detecting signs of democratisation, it argued that the robustness of authoritarianism necessitated a focus on autocracy as a mode of governance in the

Middle East: not in the negative sense - as the absence of democracy, or as a transient political set up en-route to democracy - but as a distinct analytical category (Brownlee 2002b; Bellin 2004; Volpi 2004; Posusney and Angrist 2005; Brownlee 2007; Schlumberger 2007; Sadiki 2011; Wright and Escribà-Folch 2011; Gerschewski 2013; Kailitz 2013; Köllner and Kailitz 2013).

The principal contribution of the authoritarian resilience literature is in its insistence on the heterogeneity of autocracy, and its attempts to classify and distinguish between different varieties of authoritarian regime (Geddes 1999; Gandhi and Przeworski 2006; Kailitz 2013; Wahman et al 2013; Geddes et al 2014). The overt purpose of these typologies is to facilitate causal explanations of why certain regimes remain stable, but they are also significant for their understanding of the entangled relationship between structure and agency. Thus, ‘personalism’ or ‘sultanism’ - which signifies the lack of institutional constraints on an autocrat’s personal discretions – is not an absolute categorisation of certain authoritarian regimes, but exists on a continuum and is dependent on a regime’s patrimonial capacity (Wright and Escribà-Folch 2011; Stepan and Linz 2013; Johnston 2015). The more customary and complicated arrangement is the combination of authoritarianism and democracy, also known as ‘liberalized autocracy’ (Brumberg 2002), ‘electoral authoritarianism’ (Schedler 2006; Kailitz 2013) or ‘hybrid competitive authoritarianism’ (Stepan and Linz 2013).

The literature argues that liberalised autocracies are characterised by structural resilience due to their deployment of three central strategies. Firstly, they possess and deploy the material power contained within the state’s coercive apparatus. ‘Strong’ authoritarian regimes use repressive measures and organisationally exclude rival movements, keeping them fragmented (Brownlee 2007: 2). This has been described as

the hallmark of durable Arab authoritarianism (Bellin 2004: 143; Sadiki 2011: 283). Secondly, autocracies deploy patronage and co-optation techniques – from distribution of rents to policy concessions - selectively in order to consolidate their power and to resist breakdown (Brownlee 2002; Gandhi and Przeworski 2006; Svobik 2009). Bellin (2004: 148-149) connects these two strategies by arguing that a coercive apparatus can be organised along patrimonial lines, and that rentier income can sustain expenditure on military and security forces. Lastly, it is argued that patterns of ‘legitimation’ - ‘what both members of the elite and the ordinary people believe about the ruler’s right to rule’ - also serve to delimit popular political agency and to strengthen the stable organisational basis of autocracies (Kailitz 2013: 41). This is bolstered by a regime’s dissemination of powerful rhetorical tropes, such as the claim that citizens are ‘unfit’ to rule themselves through democratic means and that they need to be ruled over by individuals or institutions that know better (Volpi 2004: 1071).

The emphasis on such mechanisms of control is useful for understanding the structural strength of authoritarianism, but it arguably leaves little room for political agency, even in so-called liberalised autocracies. The comparative politics literature attempts to sidestep this implication, arguing that political elites and ruling coalitions are sufficiently powerful to be necessary for the survival of dictators (Svobik 2009: 478), and that elite interests are protected by political parties and legislative authoritarian institutions (Wright and Escribà-Folch 2011). In particular, ‘civilian dictators’ lack unmitigated authority and require the cooperation of coalitions and institutions such as elections (Gandhi and Przeworski 2006: 18). Nevertheless, the thrust of the literature suggests that, despite the minimal level of competition permitted in such systems (Wahman et al 2013), the entire democratic process in

liberalised autocracies is largely cosmetic, functioning as a 'instrument' of conflict-management for the ruling elite (Gershenson and Grossman 2001) and enacting a display of 'election fetishism' (Sadiki 2011: 3). Elections are more effectively scrutinised as an indicator of political trends and competitive struggles over resources, rather than as forms of political participation (Brownlee 2007: 9-10).

The literature on authoritarian resilience is valuable for engaging with the phenomenon of authoritarianism on its own terms, and for delineating the way in which autocratic structures shape and condition the agency of other political actors. It also points towards the symbolic and auxiliary significance of pseudo-democratic processes, indicating the way in which they shed light on the interactions between dictators and political elites, and imbuing the citizens who participate in such seemingly vacuous exercises with a degree of agency (Lust-Okar 2008: 81).

There remains, however, a gap in this literature's investigation of political agency, stemming from its attempt to account for the survival of autocracies. Ultimately, it focuses on the agency of political elites as they navigate and exploit ruling systems to their advantage, seeing this capacity as constrained by liberalised-autocratic systems that benefit rulers more than they empower citizens. Beyond suggesting the co-dependence of dictators and other political elites, this top-down approach does not facilitate the study of popular political engagement, and of the agentive capacity contained therein. Social forces such as ethnicity, regionalism and kinship, and even Islamist political movements, are explored insofar as they impact the pseudo-democratic process, and not as forms or manifestations of political agency (Ehteshami 1999; Kubba 2000; Brumberg 2002; Herb 2002; Lucas 2003; Cavatorta 2006).

Where popular agency is evoked in the comparative politics literature, it too serves to account for authoritarian resilience. Volpi (2004: 1068) argues that the longevity of pseudo-democratic systems is not simply due to militarist cliques and elites, but reflects ‘a grave societal indecision about the state...[citizens] remain deeply divided about what an end to “hard” forms of autocratic rule should signify for the reorganisation of the polity’. This ‘societal indecision’ isn’t probed further or analysed as a form of political activity. For Gerschewski (2013: 20), ‘the number and intensity of public protests’ is the only significant, measurable indicator of societal discontent, and their absence indicates the societal legitimacy of authoritarian regimes. Diamond et al (2003: 16) continue to deploy the term ‘depoliticization’ to refer to the absence of popular political activity in the Middle East, terming it ‘one of the most pernicious cultural and ideological legacies of autocracy throughout the Middle East’.

Whilst the classification of authoritarian regimes types, and the description of the structural dynamics of pseudo-democracies, is one of the analytical strengths of this literature, it has impeded the discussion of popular forms of political engagement. Indeed, there is even a sentiment within the literature that, ‘no matter what the explanation is,’ the populace isn’t pushing sufficiently for political participation and democratic reform in the region (Bellin 2004: 145) even if that is down to the ‘element of fear’ (Sadiki 2011: 283). Moreover, the suggestion that autocracies create a contractual system of legitimacy by ingratiating their existence into the ‘belief’ system of society (Gerschewski 2013; Kailitz 2013) implies that Arab subjects are entirely constituted by and internalise authoritarian systems of domination. The argument that only the formal breakdown of autocracy signifies the collapse of this belief-system (Gerschewski 2013: 20) further entrenches this neglect of more covert

forms of political contention. Overall, the emphasis is on the powerful material and coercive capacities of autocracies. There is an absence of discussion on the symbolic dimensions of structural authority, and a concomitant need for the literature to conceptualise a more dynamic relationship between authoritarianism and a visibly quiescent populace.

2.3 Political Agency: Beyond Democratisation and Authoritarian Resilience

In an effort to expand the conceptualisation of political agency in the Middle East, a body of literature – contemporaneous with that on authoritarian resilience - has focused on political engagement beyond the formal electoral sphere (Abu-Lughod 1990; Singerman 1995; Hoodfar 1997; Bayat 2005, 2010; Albrecht 2008, 2010; Alhamad 2008; Lust-Okar 2008; Beinin and Vairel 2011), in what has been termed a ‘post-democratization’ approach (Cavatorta and Durac 2011). This scholarship does not conceive of agency as confined to the manoeuvrings of political elites within pseudo-democratic institutions, but explores agency in own right: as ‘everyday’ and symbolic, manifested in informal social networks, undertaken by rural or less-educated actors, and existing in an ‘enmeshed’ (Abu-Lughod 1990: 41) relationship with authoritarian power. Such texts attempt to transcend the structuralist and cyclical orientation of the autocracy literature, which was caught between the polarity of detecting democratisation and affirming authoritarian stability.

The first insight contained within this Middle East politics literature is that ‘informal channels of political participation’ are significant outlets for political activity (Alhamad 2008). Such channels are defined as loosely-based, informal groupings that are indigenous to the region, based mainly on kin, religion,

neighbourhood, occupation, and commercial interests (ibid: 36). By imbuing these ‘everyday’ social vehicles with political significance, Alhamad purposefully shifts the focus of analysis from elite political activity to popular engagement, while emphasising that such vehicles are shaped by the historical contexts of the communities in which they originate. Diane Singerman (1995) also illustrates the way in which a range of everyday spheres of activity in Egypt– such as marriage and educational networks - still have ‘political’ import, structuring the boundaries and interests of the political and economic order. This is echoed in Homa Hoodfar’s (1997) ethnographic study of low-income Egyptian households, in which the household serves as a socially situated institution that both protects individuals from radical state policies, and enables women to access economic resources and personal security. For Asef Bayat (2010: 11), urban public space, not democracy, is the ‘key theatre’ of popular political participation in the Middle East.

In addition to expanding the discussion on participatory vehicles of action, these studies also strive for a nuanced understanding of the motivations underpinning political behaviour in the Middle East. Informal channels of participation undoubtedly serve a material purpose, enabling citizens to further their personal interests (Alhamad 2008: 36), and facilitating popular ‘survival strategies’ in light of economic liberalisation policies (Hoodfar 1997). However, this is not their sole purpose. Singerman (1995: 8) argues against reducing political agency ‘to mere self-interest and cost benefit analysis’, and instead develops the argument that contentious collective action is pursued for its own sake, in order to enhance interpersonal relationships. People forge identities and enlarge solidarities in the process of furthering their individual and collective interests (Bayat 2010: 12). In this view, political agency - despite the trappings of authoritarianism – remains a potent force

for social transformation, mediated through a complex web of institutions, cultural norms and personal and collective interests.

Finally, these studies strongly advocate for recognising the potency of political agency even when it is understated, latent or otherwise concealed. Bayat (2010: 41) concedes that ordinary urban subjects in the Middle East, such as the unemployed and housewives, structurally lack the power of disruption, but they are nevertheless able to make 'silent' and modest claims against 'the state, the rich, and the powerful'. The actions described by Bayat – which include survival strategies such as the unlawful acquisition of land and shelter - signify 'interstitial manoeuvres in the gaps and fissures of the power structure' rather than direct, collective, clearly articulated opposition to that structure itself (Chalcraft 2016: 2). Nevertheless, Bayat proposes that this form of agentive action is ambitious in its scope, contesting state prerogatives such as the meaning of order and control of public space, and is potentially transformative, with such quiet and widespread actions eventually triggering social change through the power of big numbers. Singerman (1995: 4) has also advocated this view, arguing that political action can be subterranean and concealed, particularly under repressive conditions, but that popular political activity can predate and ultimately give rise to 'peak moment such as demonstrations'. Laila Alhamad (2008) emphasises the importance of context in defining the significance of outwardly 'non-political' activities, such as the growing of a beard as an act of defiance in Algeria. Through these studies, political agency is represented as circumspect but persistent in its occupation of social, political and symbolic structures, and as strategic as well as cooperative in its motivations. However, in understanding agency 'as it is', it is firmly located within the political status quo, and its radical potential is deferred to an indeterminate point in the future.

This literature on camouflaged forms of political engagement develops conclusions about political agency principally as a by-product of its empirical claims. Its insights can be bolstered with reference to a branch of literature that has sought to understand the relationship between agency and structure (or power/subject relations) in a much more targeted sense (Mitchell 1988; Massad 2001; Makdisi and Silverstein 2006; El Shakry 2007). Such texts are also positioned outside of the democratisation paradigm, but they emphasise the way in which political agents are discursively constructed *by* powerful systems and practices in the Middle East, whether authoritarian or colonial in nature.

Focusing on power as it is exercised and diffused by the mechanisms of the modern state, Timothy Mitchell (1988: 174) argues that new technologies of ‘disciplinary power’ in Egypt, from the Egyptian army’s system of rural discipline to the national programme of schooling, worked directly on the bodies of individuals in order to produce a habit of obedience. Omnia El Shakry (2007) also elaborates upon processes of knowledge production by examining the impact of colonial discourses on the production of social-scientific inquiry in Egypt. Joseph Massad (2001), in the case of Jordan, focuses on the manner in which national identities were produced and even imposed by state institutions, arguing that they were internalised by nationalistic discourses and came to appear as eternal essences in the self-understandings of subjects. These studies are bound by their insistence on the mediating and shaping role of structure on political subjectivities. Power is articulated as having a ‘hold’ on subjects for whom ‘reality is simply that which is capable of representation’ (Mitchell 1988: 178). Whereas Bayat (2010) spoke of agentive capacity as enabling and reformist, Saba Mahmood (2005: 15) detaches ‘the notion of agency from the goals of

progressive politics' altogether, and understands it 'only from within the discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment'.

The limitation of studies on power/subject relations is that they risk depicting subjects as fully determined by the discursive structures that they occupy, thereby rendering them speechless and lacking in agency. Lisa Wedeen (1999) indirectly counters this argument. Although she outlines the constitutive rhetorical and coercive universe of the Syrian cult of Hafiz Al-Asad, she also draws attention to the way in which the populace was able to subvert the cult's meanings, mock its grandiosity and exploit its apparent contradictions in everyday acts of political engagement, even while participating in its rituals. Above all, she challenges the implication – explicit in the authoritarian resilience literature, and suggested in studies on power relations – that subjects come to 'believe' in, or be entirely defined by, the proclaimed 'legitimacy' of authoritarian regimes (ibid: 12). While conceding that under authoritarianism, the empowering capacity of political agency remains circumscribed because of its fundamentally covert nature, Wedeen suggests that moments of radical contestation can potentially lead to the reconfiguration of constitutive authoritarian discourses.

Other studies on Middle East politics have purposefully foregone a top-down approach to political agency, instead using frameworks such as social movement theory, and drawing on the phenomenon of civil society activity in the region (Garon 2003; Cavatorta 2006, 2013; Pratt 2007; Cavatorta and Durac 2011). One such strand of literature has challenged the claim of depoliticisation through the phenomenon of Islamism, which is described as a 'recurring phenomenon that affects the lives of millions of people in the Muslim world' (Hafez 2003: 3 - see also Wiktorowicz 1999; Ismail 2001; Takeyh 2003). This literature usefully expands the remit of the

institutional political arena in the region, but it too often presents Islamist opposition movements as distinctive political entities, understanding ‘activism’ as principally comprising ‘Islamist activism’ (Wickham 2002; Clark 2004). This analytical slant is not extended to the broader populace, or channelled towards investigating political agency in a more general sense. Moreover, this literature’s deployment of social movement frameworks – largely for the study of the organisational, networking and recruitment patterns of Islamist activists - is too often overlaid onto the socio-political context of the Middle East rather than purposefully adapted or critiqued.

As with the comparative politics literature on authoritarian resilience, the Middle East politics literature begins from the premise that the politics of the region must be grasped on their own terms, beyond transitology frameworks. Both literatures challenge (using a range of theoretical frameworks) the claim that the Middle East is depoliticised, apathetic or devoid of political agency. However, where the comparative politics literature sketched a constricted understanding of political agency, as exercised by dictators, ruling elites and political coalitions, the latter has expanded the scope of enquiry to include latent, contentious and collective forms of political agency. In doing so, it addresses some of the gaps raised by the comparative politics literature, even if it lacks the typological precision in categorising varieties of authoritarianism. Indeed, studies by Mitchell (1988), Wedeen (1999), and Mahmood (2005) are insightful in suggesting the non-coercive means by which autocrats can assert their control over society, thereby adding nuance to comparative legitimisation theory (Gerschewski 2013).

Despite characterising the Middle East as an agentive political environment, the thrust of the literature, prior to the Arab Spring, depicts political activity as bound, and even constrained by, resilient authoritarian regimes. Even a study that affirms the

strength of civil society activism and associational life in the Arab world concludes by declaring that such activity ultimately encourages a ‘restructuring of political authority which remains profoundly authoritarian’ (Cavatorta and Durac 2011: 143). As noted above, there is a suggestion that popular political activity can predate and lead to the emergence of ‘peak moments such as demonstrations’ (Singerman 1995: 4), thereby transforming both agency and structure in the process (Wedeen 1999) but the scarcity of open contestation in the region deferred further exploration of this theory.

The literature during and subsequent to the ‘Arab Spring’ shifted the parameters of the debate. It paved the way for renewed discussion of the democratisation paradigm, but it also generated compelling assertions regarding the transformative impact of radical political contestation.

2.4 Political Agency and the Arab Spring

The political upheaval in the Arab world, from December 2010, led to the swift emergence of an extensive body of scholarship that grappled with the phenomenon of widespread – and unanticipated – political activity in the region. This was retrospective in tone, attempting to account for why the event was unforeseen by Middle East researchers (Gause 2011; Goodwin 2011; Hudson 2011; Lust 2011; Elman 2012). It was also self-interrogatory, suggesting that the Arab uprisings had shattered prevailing analytic frames for understanding the region, and ‘certainly cast some doubts on the validity of the paradigm of authoritarian resilience’ (Pace and Cavatorta 2012: 127). As argued by Elyachar (2014: 458), ‘Dominant concepts in the social sciences about the Arab world – that Arabs were passive, that Egyptians were

patient, that Arab states were “too strong” – had all collapsed’. Alternatively, if the scholarship was accurate at the time, then it was the populace itself who had changed: ‘the people of the Middle East are no longer willing to simply accept their misery...they are willing to take to the streets and risk their lives to demand change’ (Pollack 2011b: 7).

The Arab uprisings generated two broad scholarly trends in Middle East studies. In one respect, researchers began to engage with structural democratisation paradigms once again (Brynen et al 2012), with some optimistically describing the uprisings as beckoning a ‘fourth wave’ of democratisation (Howard and Hussain 2013; Møller and Skanning 2013; Aboushouk 2016). The removal of some dictators, and the persistence of others, sparked renewed discussion on the strength and stability of different forms of autocracy (Bellin 2012a; Brownlee et al 2013; Bank et al 2014; Derichs and Demmelhuber 2014). This literature extends the agenda set by studies such as Brynen et al (1995, 1998) by analysing the connection between the Arab uprisings and democratisation theory (Anderson 2012; Stepan and Linz 2013). Once again, it suggests that democracy is being ushered into the Middle East, but this time ‘from below’, reflecting the Arab public’s demand for democracy and human rights (Khatib 2013a). As argued by Stephen Grand (2002), ‘More than anything else, the Arab Spring has been about a yearning for democracy’.

The case for democratisation theory partly rests on the assumption that the uprisings constituted a coherent political movement that fundamentally challenged the post-colonial political order of the Arab World, and, above all, called for democracy and civil rights (Ismael and Ismael 2013; Selim 2013), ‘not just in name but also in practice and in all its particulars’ (Pollack 2011b: 7). Later studies extended this claim by attempting to quantify the scope of democratisation in the region, citing the degree

of fundamental change to the leaderships and constitutional structures of authoritarian regimes as evidence to that effect (Davis 2016; Roberts 2016).

Proclamations of impending democratisation in the Middle East have always generated claims to the contrary; in this instance, by studies calling for circumspection, particularly in light of the durability of many Arab regimes under public pressure (Bellin 2012a, 2012b). Similar studies have questioned the compatibility between democracy and Islamist parties, who performed well electorally during what was dubbed the ‘Islamist winter’ of 2011 (Cook and Stathis 2012; Turner 2012; Tibi 2013). Indeed, for Joshua Stacher (2012) and Roger Owen (2012), the Arab uprisings serve as a context for analysing the adaptability of certain autocratic political systems over others, and for refocusing attention on the coercive capacities of ruling elites. However, the debate over democratisation and authoritarian resilience is a familiar and recursive one: although it is relevant in light of the regime changes brought about by the Arab Spring, it continues to bypass the significance of popular political agency in favour of structural, explanatory frameworks.

Alternately, an extensive branch of literature has focused on the agential and subjective dimensions of popular protests, seeking to understand the ‘people’ behind the event (Dupont and Passy 2011). Questions pertaining to grievances, subjectivities and decentralized networks - which had constituted a small subset of the literature on Middle East politics prior to the uprisings – emerged rapidly in light of the intense spectacle of contestation in 2011 (Chalcraft 2011; Gamson 2011; Goodwin 2011; Telhami 2011; Dabashi 2012; Armbrust 2013; Rennick 2013; Sabea 2013, 2014; Shahin 2014; Abdelrahman 2015). Within this field, some studies deployed the Arab Spring as a prime context for examining the relationship between agency and structure during instances of popular contention in the region. John Chalcraft (2016:

7-8) argues that the novelty of the ‘Arab Spring’ must be grasped with reference to long-term episodes of ‘unruly, transgressive and creative contentious politics in the history of the MENA’. In doing so, he emphasises the parallel significance of agency (innovation and spontaneity) and structure (existent organisational networks) in fuelling cycles of protest (ibid: 516). Charles Tripp (2013: 5), in an extensive study on the interplay between power and resistance in the Middle East, has also demonstrated that the Arab uprisings emerged from a context of subtle ‘long-simmering resentments’, such as the 1980s riots in Tunisia, workers’ protests in Egypt, and the 1980 ‘Berber spring’ in Algeria. Certainly, understanding the ‘roots’ and ‘contexts’ of the protests has increasingly emerged as a key research agenda, even if a number of these studies prioritise structural factors over agency-centric explanations (Gana 2013; Rand 2013; Badran 2014).

More commonly, the literature in the aftermath of the Arab Spring re-centred political agency by emphasising its novel mode of emergence and its radical nature (Elyachar 2014). The Arab uprisings were described as an ‘Arab Awakening’ (Pollack 2011a; Cavatorta and Pace 2012; Ramadan 2012; Dawisha 2013) evoking George Antonius’ 1938 seminal work *The Arab Awakening*, and suggesting not only the reinvigoration of Arab nationhood (Roberts 2016: 273), but the exceptional nature of this particular contentious moment. A stream of sanguine assessments suggested that the Arab uprisings had reconfigured ‘what was imagined to be possible’ in the minds of Arab populations (Brynen et al 2012: 111), imbuing the region’s peoples with new forms of self-understanding (Hanafi 2012), ‘a new energy and a new sense of possibility’ (Bellin 2012b: 48), and ‘creat[ing] the possibility of self-consciousness’ (Tripp 2015: 3). This emergent political subjectivity is in turn depicted

as transformative of structure, constituting a literal and metaphorical ‘breaking of the chains of authoritarianism’ (Affaya 2011).

This bold appraisal of political agency rests on what has been described as a defining quality of the Arab uprisings: the visual phenomenon of large crowds, demanding peaceful change and articulating their right to freedom, dignity and other ‘human’ aspirations (Stepan and Linz 2013: 21; Roberts 2016: 272; Willis 2016: 50). The public articulation of individual and collective interests is represented as the hallmark of political agency, in part because it possesses tangible, practical implications. The regional chant ‘the people want the fall of the regime’ (*Ash-sha ‘b yurid isqaṭ an-niẓam*) has been described as a strikingly direct statement of the popular will of the Arab people (Achcar 2013: 13), no longer couched in euphemism or understatement. Moreover, the broader subset of demands expressed by protesters is represented as progressive and pragmatic, encompassing calls for ‘meaningful democratic change’ (Dawisha 2013: 11), ‘the setting up of free and fair elections’ (Deeb 2012: 68) and ‘hopes for a decent life and the possibility of earning an honest wage’ (Roberts 2016: 276). The rhetoric in which such demands was expressed stemmed from ‘Arab political culture’ (Brynen et al 2012: 111) and was adapted to the individual socio-political contexts of local protesters (Raman 2012). The process of articulation is thus depicted as empowering because it is pragmatic in nature, progressive in purpose and organic in origin. Such qualities have also been ascribed to the Arab media outlets that emerged during the protests, and which played a prominent role in amplifying the demands of protesters (Brynen et al 2012: 251).

In addition, these practices of contentious articulation are emblematic of political agency because they are symbolically significant, imbuing ‘the people’ with the capacity for unfettered speech (Sabea 2013). Tripp (2013: 221) has argued that the

public expression of collective demands amplifies individual identities and subjectivities, and paves the way for ‘voices that have been written out of history, giving them the chance to reassert themselves and their rights’. It also nurtures collective identities by imbuing protesters with a ‘compelling unity of purpose and method’ (Dawisha 2013: 110). There is a sharp contrast between the constraints of authoritarianism and the euphoric openness of the revolutionary moment that further enhances the symbolic significance of such expression: ‘After decades of repression, and their inability to express their opinions...the Arab world finally broke its chains in order to say what it wants, whenever it wants’ (Bell 2013). Contentious articulation by protestors affirms their identities as claims-makers and signals their ability to demand accountability from their oppressors.

The central contribution of this agent-centred literature is in its sustained focus on the bottom-up dynamics of political contestation in the region. It is not the political elites, but the ‘ordinary citizens who went onto the streets and public cities day after day’ whose grievances, motivations, and activities are the central subject of study (Dawisha 2013: 110). This approach has supplied valuable analyses of the local and regional dynamics shaping different forms of claims-making in 2011 (Heydemann and Leenders 2011; Weyland 2012; Bamert et al 2015; Hess 2016), in addition to in-depth studies of the individual contexts in which protests took place, particularly in Egypt and Tunisia (Ghannam 2012; Gana 2013; Sabea 2013; Korany 2014; Shain 2014; Wahdan 2014; Willis 2016).

In some respects, this literature is a pertinent extension to the contextually-sensitive tradition of Middle East scholarship, outlined above, which had always operated beyond the democratisation paradigm (Singer 1995; Wedeen 1999; Bayat 2010). However, it differs by focusing on an instance of visible – rather than

concealed or imperceptible – political contestation. The result is that its conclusions are far bolder, suggesting the transformative potential of such revolutionary events. Walter Ambrust (2013) argues that the killing of the Egyptian protesters on 28 January propelled initiatives for rethinking the place of women in society, while public spaces such as Tahrir Square in Egypt served as a ‘critical imaginary’, disrupting the political and social familiar and reconstituting the notion of the ‘the people’ (Sabea 2013). The literature is at its strongest when it connects such overarching claims about symbolic systems with an analysis of the contextually specific practices undertaken by local actors.

However, there are a number of key questions arising from these studies, pertaining especially to their conceptualisation of agency during the Arab uprisings. What is the relationship between the empowering forms of political agency that emerged in 2011, and existent authoritarian regimes? A prior line of argumentation – in both the comparative politics and Middle East literatures – is that authoritarian regimes transmit dominant meanings to the populace, either by presenting a narrative of legitimacy (Gerschewski 2013), creating rituals (Wedeen 1999) or imposing practices of categorisation and classification (Massad 2001). The Arab Spring literature does not tend to probe the impact of open contestation on such meanings, focusing instead on agentic action as a discrete phenomenon. Where it does discuss the subversion of authoritarian practices, they are presented as coercive, material systems of control (Bellin 2012b: 35): for instance, prohibitions on public protest, or repressive political leaderships. The discussion of political engagement is not accompanied by an analysis of the anatomy of power.

The study by Tripp (2013) is a noteworthy exception to this trend. It engages in an extended discussion of the way in which forms of open resistance reveal the

dynamics of authoritarian power, unmasking its natural guise and disrupting its representations of subjugated peoples. However, its principal focus remains on resistance, and on its subversive qualities, instead of theorising the emergence of political agency as a more expansive concept. In addition, Tripp's analytical framework approaches resistance as an overwhelmingly positive occurrence, emphasising the way in which it empowers local actors to reclaim public spaces, political institutions and historical narratives. Although Tripp (ibid: 12-13) suggests that resistance may have become imbricated with power, and given way to disillusionment, an absence of consensus and practices of 'Othering', this is presented as occurring in the aftermath of the 2011 protests, and not during the moment of resistance itself.

In some respects, the Arab public has gone from being fully constituted by power to fully constituting, without necessarily exploring or problematising this seamless transformation, and without sufficiently heeding Abu-Lughod's (1990) injunction to avoid romanticising acts of resistance. Similarly, although there have been analyses of revolutionary 'setbacks' that have taken place after the Arab uprisings, such as the reversion to military rule in Egypt (Roberts 2016), manipulation of the misguided *Tamarod* youth movement in 2013 (Elyacahar 2014: 460) and the 'hijacking' of protests by Islamists (Bradley 2012), 'the sense of community and exhilarating *communitas* generated during the struggle' (Werbner et al 2014: 8) remains largely undisputed.

There is thus a need to unpack the practice of open, articulated contention during moments of protest, and to explore its internal dynamics – the extent to which it was collective and unfettered – in addition to its potentially imbricated relationship with power. This should be done without framing contentious activity in terms of a

‘modernist narrative of progress, democracy, liberation and socio-economic distribution’ (Chalcraft 2016: 4), or indeed, in terms of retrenched authoritarianism.

2.5 Political Agency under Authoritarianism: Toward a Point of Enquiry

This overview has highlighted a number of gaps within the literatures on comparative politics and Middle East politics, as they have respectively engaged with the phenomenon of political agency under authoritarianism. The comparative politics literature has supplied useful typologies for classifying the material practices of authoritarian regimes and for grasping the robustness of authoritarianism, but it offers less clarity on the discursive and symbolic dimensions of authoritarian power. It has also neglected popular modes of contention in its focus on elite behaviours and structures. The Middle East politics literature partly addresses the latter by drawing attention to ‘everyday’ forms political engagement, but it too presents authoritarianism as a circumscribing and defining force on the agency of the Arab populace. Thus, the first gap suggests the need to explore the complex and conflictual relationship between political agency and authoritarian domination within a particular social context.

Secondly, the Middle East politics literature on the Arab Spring raises new questions about the extent to which practices of open, articulated contention – such as those manifested during the widespread protests and demonstrations – are capable of transforming both agency and authoritarianism. The literature is useful for re-focusing its energies on the concept of agency, but there remains a need to unpack such assertions further, particularly as many studies have ascribed the re-entrenchment of authoritarianism to the emergence of post-revolutionary setbacks, rather than as being

potentially rooted in the internal dynamics of contention itself. Above all, the analytical case base remains rather narrow, centred principally on Egypt and Tunisia, despite the range of authoritarianisms highlighted by the comparative politics literature.

Drawing on the concepts and gaps of this literature, the central research question of this thesis is:

How, and to what extent, did open insubordination in the Arab Spring transform authoritarian structures of domination and generate new political subjectivities?

This research question can be further disaggregated into two constituent parts: a need to identify the nature of power structures and agency *prior to* open contestation, and the extent to which these are subsequently transformed during a radical event such as the Arab uprisings. The following chapter will explore the theoretical frameworks that have attempted to understand the relationship between structures of power and contentious political agency and resistance, and will integrate the most relevant insights into a model for understanding political agency in the context of the Arab uprisings.

Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter indicated that the dynamics of political agency under authoritarianism, and during instances of open insubordination, are key gaps emerging from the literature on Middle East politics. The central research question is as follows:

How, and to what extent, did open insubordination in the Arab Spring transform authoritarian structures of domination and generate new political subjectivities?

This formulation signals the need for a theoretical framework that views structure and agency as theoretically interconnected and mutually implicating: an orientation that is increasingly adopted in the social sciences (amongst others, Giddens 1976, 1981; Wendt 1987; Sewell 1992, 1996; Buechler 2014). Ultimately however, the framework should be agency-centric, as the focus of the research question is not on demonstrating the pre-eminence of structural power but on understanding the emergence of political agency in relation to it.

This chapter will begin by outlining the core theoretical approaches that have supplied a framework for understanding the emergence of political agency in relation to particular structure of power. The frameworks reviewed here have been developed by political sociologists (Snow et al 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; Polletta 2004; Armstrong and Bernstein 2008) who themselves draw extensively on feminist,

cultural and institutional understandings of political agency (Bourdieu 1977, 1985; Smith 1987, 1990; Friedland and Alford 1991; Sewell 1992; Thornton and Ocasio 1999, 2008). I utilise social movement theory principally because it has reflected intensely and explicitly upon the notion of political agency using social movement case studies (Maiguashca 2013: 118; Marchetti 2013: 2), while drawing attention to the importance of the ‘public enactment’ of contentious practices (Williams 2004: 102). Most importantly, it has done so with an emphasis on the structural contexts within which agentive action emerges (Morris 1992; Meyer 2002) rendering it a fruitful body of theory with which to engage.

This chapter reviews three approaches to understanding the emergence of political agency: structural social movement theories (particularly multi-institutional politics theory, which emerged from within the discipline), framing theory, and resistance theories. It delineates their characteristics, and their strengths and limitations for answering the research question. Following this, the final section of the chapter outlines a conceptual model for investigating political agency, linking together complementary concepts while ensuring epistemological coherence.

3.2 Structural Social Movement Theory

3.2.1 Political Process Theory

The theoretical social movement literature, from its inception in the 1980s, has concerned itself with the way in which contentious activity is situated in relation to political structures (Klandermans et al 1988; Morris and Mueller 1992; Jenkins and Klandermans 1995). The most influential branch of social movement theory to have dealt with this subject is Political Process Theory, or PPT (McAdam 1982; McAdam

et al 1996). The underlying premise of PPT is that in order to understand the nature of open political contestation, we have to grasp the structural contexts in which this action occurs, thus adopting a top-down perspective (Maignascha 2013: 123). Political agency is rooted within guiding arrangements and dynamics that have to be clearly outlined.

Having adopted this premise, PPT deploys the term structure to describe ‘those political institutions, arrangements, and processes that distinguish one political context from another’, and which are defined as an objective, durable, and constraining force (Polletta 1999: 64-65). In the context of contentious action, it specifies that the most significant structures are the institutions of the nation state (McAdam et al 1996; Meyer et al 2002; Tilly and Tarrow 2007; Marchetti 2013). The definition of states endorsed by PPT is that of states as ‘sets of political, military, judicial and bureaucratic organizations that exert political authority and coercive control over people living within the borders of well-defined territories’ (Amenta et al 2002: 49). As indicated in this quotation, the structural power of the state is conceptualised as being principally material in nature, emanating from a state’s coercive functions and its capacity to regulate the formal political sphere (Maignascha 2013: 123). The emphasis is on identifying ‘both durable and variable aspects of the state relevant to a given movement at a particular point in time’ (Smith and Fetner 2010: 18), with the implication that the variability in such structures is internally generated rather than affected by external actors.

PPT argues that political action is both constrained and enabled by state structures. State structure is an enabling force in that the relaxation of this authority – indicated above to be material and/or coercive - allows political action to emerge through ‘political opportunities’, which either encourage or discourage political actors

to deploy their resources in pursuit of contentious activity (Tarrow 1996: 54).

Structural political contexts ultimately sanction the availability of contentious activity available to particular populations (Tarrow 1993a: 283). Following such openings, political actors can challenge and be situated in a directly contentious relationship with governmental authority (Tilly 1978; Della Porta 1996; McAdam et al 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2007).

Attempts within PPT to delineate the precise nature of state capacity have focused on democratic institutions within advanced capitalist countries (Della Porta 1996; Rucht 1996; Tilly 1999; McAdam et al. 2001; Amenta et al. 2002; Smith and Fetner 2010). Changes within democratic institutions afford political actors the space, opportunity or resources through which to mobilise themselves into action. For instance, policy environments can open up in ways that subsequently shape the collective action decisions of a social movement, thereby influencing the forms and outcomes of political activity (Foweraker 1995; Tarrow 1996). In particular, the coercive capacities of state power play an important role in repressing or policing protest, thereby hindering its emergence (Tilly 1978; Kriest et al 1995; Della Porta 1996).

One of the strengths of PPT is the attention it draws to the shaping role of state institutions on the form, trajectory and timing of political action. The premise is sound: we cannot understand agency as isolated from its context, and PPT elaborates mechanisms for understanding the emergence of claim making procedures. Nevertheless, critiques of this dimension of PPT abound: principally, that its mechanisms for political action function as 'structural variables' (Gamson and Meyer 1996; Goodwin and Jasper 1999, 2004). Thus, PPT neglects the agentic components of action - the way in which political actors shape and structure the meanings that

propel them to action (Snow and Benford 1988) – and so tends to describe conditions rather than choices, despite packaging structural openings in the language of ‘opportunity’.

However, the more glaring limitation of PPT is not its structuralist bias, which is to be anticipated, nor even that it assumes the existence of a liberal democratic state, although this poses a difficulty when translating its framework to authoritarian regimes (Kenney 2001). It is that, above all, its very conception of structural power is rooted in the political institutions of the state. ‘Environments’ are defined in a material sense, consisting of particular political, coercive and regulatory practices (Foweraker 1995; Tarrow 1996) and not as possessive of symbolic or discursive authority. The literature review highlighted a gap in understanding the meanings delimited by authoritarian regimes, and the way in which such meanings were contested or affirmed prior to and during the Arab uprisings. PPT, which conceptualises meaning or ‘culture’ as entirely distinct from structure (Polletta 2004: 163), is thus unsuited to tackling this aspect of the research question.

Lastly, despite its emphasis on the enabling function of political structure, PPT does not offer a fully interactionist account of the dynamics between political contexts and political agency, beyond the concept of ‘political opportunity structures’. There is little indication that political actors can shape the contexts and environments of activity: only a functionalist emphasis on the way in which insurgents ‘can be expected to mobilise’ in response to state-level changes (McAdam et al 1996: 10). The notion of an ‘expected’ response also cements PPT’s assumption that social movement participants are utility maximising, rational actors, thereby leaving no room for understanding the way in which participants can be ‘animated by an entangled mixture of feelings and calculations’ (Gould 2004: 173). Ultimately, what

is lacking in PPT is a framework for grasping the underlying, conflictual power relations connecting actors to the structures they are positioned in opposition to, and a more nuanced view of ‘the texture and scope of human agency’ (Gould 2004: *ibid*) that takes into account political subjectivities and processes of meaning making (Polletta 1999, 2002; Crossley 2002; Maiguashcha 2013).

3.2.2 Multi-Institutional Politics Theory

A theoretical alternative to PPT that has attempted to offset its limitations, whilst affirming the significance of structural power, is multi-institutional politics theory (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008). This conceptual framework builds on contemporary institutional, feminist and cultural theory (Douglas 1986; Swidler 1986; Smith 1987, 1990; Fligstein 1991; Friedland and Alford 1991; Sewell 1992, 1999; Scott 1994; Thornton and Occasio 2008), in addition to existent critiques of PPT (Crossley 2002; Polletta 1999; 2004). In what they describe as a ‘theory of society and power’, Armstrong and Bernstein (2008: 82) argue that domination is organised around institutions, defined as ‘supraorganizational patterns of human activity’, which are simultaneously material and symbolic. Their primary objective is to draw attention to existent conceptualisations of the symbolic dimension of political structures, i.e. the meanings generated by them, and the way in which these meanings go on to shape dominant understandings of political reality (Polletta 1999; Sewell 1999) and material conditions, resources and inequalities (Valocchi 2005b). In doing so, they disaggregate the monolithic entity of the state and move beyond the idea of power as a predominantly material force (Clemens and Cook 1999).

The fundamental tenets of the multi-institutional model constitute a substantive expansion to PPT. Its first principle is that society is a ‘multi-institutional’ system. In this formulation, ‘structure’ or ‘power’ does not exist as a homogenous and totalised entity (Sewell 1992: 16) but is manifested within a multiplicity of different institutional spheres: the state, capitalism, democracy, and the family, according to Friedland and Alford (1991: 248), but also science (Moore 1999), law (Bernstein 2003), medicine (Turner 1999) and the media (Gamson 1989), all of which have been analysed as influential institutional spheres. In this conception of power, the state undoubtedly remains an important institution: they (states) ‘generally establish rules that govern other institutions of society’ (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008: 82), ‘alter the environment more profoundly and systematically than other organizations’ (Fligstein 1991: 314) and have a particularly potent capacity to create new social categories (Polletta 2004: 165). However, the model differs from PPT in viewing the ‘nature, power, logic, and centrality of states as historically variable’, without taking their significance for granted (Friedland and Alford 1991: 238). As a result, ‘the state’ is viewed as one of many institutional loci of power, rather than an entity possessed of an abstract drive for power and control that is *de facto* the subject of study.

Secondly, when the state (or any other institution) is selected as a focus of analysis, its practices of domination are not reducible to the deployment of material resources in order to elicit obedience and assent, as assumed by PPT, but also include the way in which ‘symbols, belief systems, even values’ prefigure as part of the practice of domination (Friedland and Alford 1991: 237). The understanding of institutions as both material and symbolic systems is a central part of the multi-institutional theoretical model (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008: 83), inspired by the theoretical tradition on the interconnectedness of classifications and objective social

practices (Foucault 1977; Bourdieu 1977, 1985). As fundamentally classificatory systems, institutions authorise certain relations, fix processes of interaction, disseminate narratives and traditions, and above all, delineate the dimensions of conformity and deviance (Douglas 1986; Gamson 1989; Polletta 1999). These categorisations of power, interest and prestige subsequently shape the way in which resources are distributed within society (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008: 84-85). An institution's material and symbolic practices are thus inextricably connected and mutually reinforcing.

One of the most salient concepts within multi-institutional politics theory is 'institutional logic' (Sewell 1992): a term that describes the mechanism through which institutions exercise this dual capacity for material strength and symbolic organisation. Institutional logics have been defined as 'the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their reality' (Thornton and Ocasio 1999: 804). Institutional logics govern the interactions of individuals and groups by constituting the 'rules of the game' through which actors operate and can engage in political struggle (Smith 1987; Friedland and Alford 1991; Polletta 2004). Most significantly, the literature argues that institutional logics can come to 'constitute actors' by creating a value system that supplies individuals with vocabularies of motive and a sense of self (identity) in relation to that value system (Clemens and Cook 1999: 454; Friedland and Alford 1991: 251), and through practices of categorisation that delimit meanings, expectations and behavioural norms (Douglas 1986; Valocchi 2005b). The multi-institutional model emphasises that these routinised practices of categorisation are particularly powerful because they can come to appear as a natural way of doing

things, delineating the normal and excluding the abnormal, and concealing their influence as they begin to be ‘taken for granted’ (Bourdieu 1977; Douglas 1986; Gamson 1989; Clemens and Cook 1999; Polletta 2004).

Moreover, the constitutive capacity of institutional logics contributes to the reinforcement of institutions themselves, and of the social relations and meanings that they generate (Friedland and Alford 1991: 249; Clemens and Cook 1999: 445).

Individuals are not passive bystanders in relation to this process but active reproducers of meaning, who ‘themselves and for themselves constitute the observability and reportability of what has happened or is going on’ (Smith 1987: 161). The concept of institutional logics affirms the mutually-reinforcing connection between structure and agency. In contrast to PPT, multi-institutional theory stresses that a dominant configuration of power does not operate in externality to political actors (with actors at most responding to structural changes) but is embodied in the material and symbolic practice of actors themselves (Smith 1987: 175).

At this juncture, it could be argued that multi-institutional theory diminishes the agency of political actors by emphasising the overpowering authority of institutions. However, Armstrong and Bernstein (2008: 87) lend institutions a degree of fragility by introducing the concept of ‘institutional contradiction’. This term caveats the constitutive power of institutions, suggesting that their meanings are potentially contradictory and therefore open to exploitation by various actors. Contradiction can be intra-institutional, with instabilities of meaning inherent in one institution: for instance, the institutional construction of ‘minorities’ or outliers that then become a subsequent basis of challenge (Clemens and Cook 1999: 449). Contradiction can also be inter-institutional, appearing when the logics or claims of institutions are incommensurate and can be subsequently exploited by challengers (Friedland and

Alford 1991: 241). In both instances, it is evident that individuals and groups can disrupt 'stable' institutional routines – both material and symbolic - by seeking out alternative interpretations to established symbols and practices (Collins 1990; Clemens and Cook 1999; Steensland 2006).

The central strength of this theoretical model is that it develops a clear framework for conceptualising any dominant configuration of power that political actors are shaped by, operate within and negotiate. The 'cultural environment' (Williams 2004) of political action is here disaggregated and identified as existing within specific institutionalised contexts (Crossley 2002: 139). This conception of structure is particularly valuable for analysing 'authoritarianism' as a mode of practice embodied in specific political regimes, encapsulating its material dimensions (Bellin 2004; Gandhi and Przeworski 2006; Svolik 2009) and its symbolic capacities (Mitchell 1988; Wedeen 1999), and stressing the way it is both constitutive of actors' identities and potentially rife with contradiction. Ultimately, Armstrong and Bernstein build effectively on PPT: they retain the theory's original commitment to delineating the material dimensions of structural power but offset its limitations by broadening the scope of its authority and its impact on social relations.

There remain some limitations to using this framework as the sole basis for answering the research question. Although it is effective in outlining a conception of structure, and even suggests that such structure is subject to change by political agents during everyday instances (Sewell 1999), it does not supply concrete theoretical tools for examining the nature of contestations over meaning, particularly in moments of open confrontation. Neither does the theory offer a clear outline of the ways in which actors can exploit institutional contradictions. Armstrong and Bernstein assert that agents have the potential to be re-constitutive of their material and symbolic worlds,

but their focus remains on delineating the way in which institutions constitute actors through the mechanisms of institutional logic.

Secondly, the constitutive capacity of institutions, which defines individual identities and practices, risks diminishing political agency if it is applied comprehensively to authoritarian contexts. The notion that ‘institutional thinking is in the minds of individuals’ (Douglas 1986: 4) would struggle to accommodate the phenomenon of ‘acting as if’: the re-performance of authoritarian rituals despite scepticism or disbelief in their legitimacy and authenticity (Wedeen 1999). This does not diminish the usefulness of the framework, but it suggests the need for a delicate balance between acknowledging the structural strengths of institutions, while remaining open to the myriad of ways in which actors navigate institutional logics. ‘Institutional contradiction’ cannot become the new ‘political opportunity’ (a structural condition masquerading as a choice), but must be analysed as a set of tangible, subversive practices undertaken by political actors.

3.3 Social Movement Framing Theory

A prominent approach to analysing the agentic dimensions of contestation is framing theory, which has emerged as a key conceptual toolkit in the scholarship on social movements and political mobilisation (Snow et al 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; Gamson 1992; Hunt et al 1994; Carroll and Ratner 1996; Benford and Snow 2000; Miceli 2005). As with multi-institutional politics theory, this too is rooted in social movement studies; however, where the structural branch of social movement theory stresses the durability of a configuration of power, framing theory asserts that it can

be contested, altered and even transformed, and in turn supplies tools for analysing political agency through this process.

Framing theory places the construction of identities and individuals' meaning making practices as central to its understanding of this process of political contestation (Laraña et. al 1994; Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Davis 2002). Avoiding determinism, it emphasises the element of 'choice' underpinning the relationship between political actors and structures, arguing that actors can engage in the social construction of reality through their own discursive practices (Jasper 2004). It views structure and agency as inextricable. Individuals occupy an existent system of meaning that they are capable of reconstructing: 'experiences are frames, but I frame my experiences' (Crook and Taylor 1980: 246).

The central process in this social construction of reality involves 'framing' or re-presenting meanings within a particular context. Frames are 'schemata of interpretation' that enable individuals to locate and label particular occurrences within their social environment (Goffman 1974), and 'framing' itself is defined as an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency at the level of reality construction (Benford and Snow 2000: 614). The meanings that actors encounter within their socio-political environments, which both constitute reality and actors' own identities, are susceptible to change through a process of re-articulation (Tarrow 1992, 1993a; Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Benford and Snow 2000; Meyer et al. 2002; Williams 2002; Blühdorn 2006; Kockleman 2007; Lindekilde 2014).

According to the framing literature, one key purpose of the 'framing' undertaken by actors is to mobilise people against an existent and dominant authority (Snow and Benford 1988: 199). Political agency is conceptualised here as a strategic capacity, involving interaction with existent structures in order to achieve a change in

the power status quo. Contentious, collective groups of political actors, here presented as ‘social movements’, undertake this ‘signifying work’ in ‘ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists’ (Snow and Benford 1998: 198). Actors can even evoke suppressed contentious meanings or ‘hidden transcripts’ of dissent in order to re-express them as grievances and motivational impetuses for action (Gamson 1992). In addition to its instrumental significance, the act of framing is also said to shape political subjectivities, because it constitutes an ‘enlargement of personal identity for participants and offers fulfilment and realisation of self’ (Gamson 1992: 56).

According to the literature, this enlargement of identity takes place on both a personal and collective basis, due to the building of group solidarities and shared relations with a broader community or practice (Polletta and Jasper 2001; Eschle and Maiguashca 2005; Maiguashca 2013).

The central concept in framing theory is ‘collective action framing’: a term that describes the process through which actors undertake this framing work and generate resultant schemata of interpretation, or ‘collective action frames’ (Snow and Benford 1988). According to David Snow and Robert Benford, collective action framing can be broken down into three procedures. The first is ‘diagnostic framing’, or ‘the identification of a problem and the attribution of blame or causality’ (1988: 200). Customarily, it is much simpler for a set of actors to achieve consensus over the former than the latter. The second is ‘prognostic framing’, the purpose of which is ‘not only to suggest solutions to the problem but to identify strategies, tactics, and targets’ (Snow and Benford 1988: 201). Often there is a direct correspondence between the identification of a problem and its presence within the framing of a proposed solution. Finally, ‘motivational framing’ encapsulates the development of a

‘vocabulary of motive’ and encourages other individuals to undertake collective action (Snow and Benford 1988: 202). Taken as a whole, collective action frames communicate a sequencing of events, or a ‘narrative’, which is actively disseminated as an alternative understanding of social reality (Polletta and Gardner 2015: 535).

The relationship between collective action frames and extant meanings within a particular environment is clarified in the central concept of ‘frame resonance’ (Kubal 1998; Snow and Benford 1988; Zald 1998; Williams 2004). Snow and Benford (1988), building on Gramsci (1971) and his argument that any political education must be linked to the nature of the belief system it targets, argue that ‘resonance’ captures the notion that new meanings must be evocative of existent understandings in order for a target audience to find them compelling as a motivator to action (see also Valocchi 2005a: 54). There should be a ‘salience’ between the values that a movement is trying to promote and the ‘larger belief system’ of potential constituents (Snow and Benford 1988: 205). However, new frames must also shift the parameters of the debate slightly so as to be sufficiently contentious (Noakes and Johnston 2005: 11). For instance, the framing of ‘a woman’s body is her own’ in the women’s movement ‘makes sense only in a cultural discourse that highlights notions of individual autonomy’, while rechanneling the configuration of that discourse for the attainment of novel goals (Zald 1988: 266-67). In order to achieve this balance, actors engage in ‘frame alignment’ discourses, whereby new, radical meanings are carefully calibrated with existent understandings (Benford and Snow 2000: 614; Noakes and Johnston 2005: 8).

Lastly, there have been attempts to develop a framework for evaluating the meaning making strength of framing processes (Snow and Benford 1986, 1988). An initially extensive model by Snow and Benford has been simplified by Noakes and

Johnston (2005: 15), who have outlined three ways of evaluating a frame and disaggregating the ‘qualities’ that make framing more resonant:

1. ‘Cultural compatibility’: whether the content of a collective action frame synchronises with an extant stock of meanings.
2. ‘Frame consistency’: whether the internal narrative communicated by a collective action frame is cohesive.
3. ‘Empirical credibility’: whether the frame coheres with the way in which the target audience sees the world and/or unfolding events on the ground.

In addition to the qualities of the frame, it has been that argued ‘claims makers’ themselves, whose primary role is ‘to communicate the movement’s frames to current and potential constituents’ (Noakes and Johnston 2005: 7-8) must also have credibility according to the recipients of such meanings (Williams 2004: 105). Noakes and Johnson concede that this evaluative criteria is not exhaustive and has not been ‘empirically verified’, but state that its utility is in capturing the variable strength of collective action frames. This attempt to delimit ‘frame resonance’ arguably acts as a check on political agency by suggesting that the meaning making process is not automatically constitutive of social reality, with its impact dependent on the interplay of text and context.

The principal strength of framing theory is that it supplies a clear framework for understanding and analysing political agency as a representational capacity that is situated in relation to an existent, and dominant, configuration of meaning. It is agentic because it is centred on the role of individuals as knowledge producers, capable of transforming their social worlds and their political subjectivities. In its most minimalist variant of ‘collective action framing’, framing theory is parsimonious

but with a wide applicability, building neatly on an influential sociolinguistic theory instated by Erving Goffman (1974), who deployed frame analysis in order to study the cognitive organisation of social experience. Thus, although framing theory has traditionally been oriented towards democratic contexts (Blühdorn 2006: 17; Heller and Jones 2013: 165), its general, interactional principles have led to its increased applied to non-Western democratic contexts (Irwin-Zarecka 1994; Osa and Corduneanu-Huci 2009; Clarke 2013; Drissel 2017). Through the concept of frame resonance, framing theory is also useful in specifying the precise linkage between a collective action frame, produced and articulated by contentious political actors, and the particular system of meaning in which this frame is located and through which its injunctions become relevant (Polletta 1999: 70).

Despite its utility, there remain some limitations to framing theory. The first is the broad and somewhat amorphous way in which it understands structure. The theory refers to ‘larger belief systems’ (Snow and Benford 1988: 205), a ‘dominant culture’ (Noakes and Johnston 2005; Johnston 2009) and ‘cultural environments’ (Hart 2007: 1) but it does not specify the material or symbolic sites in which cultural norms are embodied. Whereas multi-institutional theory argues that meanings are located within specific institutional contexts, framing theory views this ‘culture’ as environmentally diffuse: ‘the extant stock of meanings, beliefs, ideologies, practices, values, myths, narratives and the like’ (Snow et al 1986: 629). This makes it difficult to gauge the scope of ‘frame resonance’. How do we clarify which particular meanings political actors should be amplifying, if the ‘cultural environment’ comprises all societal values?

Secondly, framing theory has been critiqued for understanding agency as a principally strategic capacity (Steinberg 2002; Gould 2004; Jasper 2004). The framing

process is presented as a way for individuals to attain tangible political outcomes, and frame resonance is a way of exploiting culture to maximise tactical goals. The ‘culture’ or established set of meanings which actors have access to is often described as a ‘tool kit’ or ‘pool of resources’, to be strategically selected from in order to mobilise as many people as possible (Swidler 1986; d’Anjou and Van Male 1998; Noakes and Johnson 2005). This is evident in the way in which framing processes have increasingly been quantified in a bid to explain ‘mobilization success’ (Jasper and Poulsen 1995; McAdam et al 1996; Zald 1996; Johnston 2002, 2009; Oliver and Johnston 2005; Westby 2005; Howell 2012; Jasper 2014; Doerr et al 2015). For instance, Hank Johnston (2009: 6) stresses that ‘cultural factors...still can be grouped, counted and their influence analysed’, and argues that ‘even though culture is everywhere, it is important to approach it systematically and parse it into categories that are empirically verifiable’. Polletta and Gardner also indicate that it is possible to empirically establish ‘the political consequences of popular stories on...the policymaking process’ (2015: 544). Such research suggests that the practical impact of framing can be measured, even though it has been acknowledged that affirming the success of frame resonance by determining it post-hoc risks tautology (Williams 2003: 107).

This strategic understanding of framing, and of political agency more generally, arguably undermines the constructivist underpinnings of framing theory. The initial formulation of framing theory (Snow et al 1986; Snow and Benford 1988) defies the distinction between instrumental and expressive understandings of political agency, and stresses the significance of framing on individual and collective subjectivities: a view that continues to be upheld (Polletta 1997; Gamson 2002; Meyer 2002; Williams 2002; Eschle 2005; Maiguashca and Marchetti 2013). However, although this

perspective is often affirmed, it is neglected in empirical accounts of framing processes. Framing studies that have focused on mobilisation success (Johnston 2002, 2009; Oliver and Johnston 2005; Westby 2005) have not explored the way in which issues of recognition, perception and representation constitute a stake in the process of struggle. This representational process is particularly crucial for social movement actors whose identities have been delimited by dominant cultural codes (Crossley 2002; Williams 2004).

Finally, the concept of frame resonance potentially diminishes the contentious nature of reality construction. ‘Resonance’ suggests that new understandings must cohere with established cultural norms in order to be persuasive (Snow and Benford 1988: 205). However, social movement theorists also concede that ‘popular culture mostly contains interpretations of situations synchronized to support the status quo’ (Noakes and Johnston 2005: 10) and that therefore frames must possess an oppositional approach towards this popular tool kit (d’Anjou and Van Male 1998; Tarrow 1998). Chalcraft (2016: 21) poses this contradiction as a question: ‘when cultural frames resonate widely, then to what extent are they contentious?’ This is particularly problematic for understanding framing during moments of radical contestation such as the Arab uprisings, where a system of meaning was more substantively challenged (Affaya 2011). Although this tension is not well resolved in the literature, it can be minimised through a more precise breakdown of the ‘cultural’ content of collective action frames: which institutional contexts are they situated within, and in what ways do they affirm and contest their meanings? Noakes and Johnston (2005: 8) also attempt to offset the internal incongruity of ‘frame resonance’ by suggesting that a cultural stock contains a multiplicity of interpretations, some of

which may well be contradictory; as a result, actors can select and package only those that are most congenial to their cause.

To conclude, framing theory's strength is in presenting tools for analysing agency as a strategic, representational capacity for meaning making. In moments of open contestation, political actors generate 'collective action frames' that capitalise on what is resonant within a dominant system of meaning, and do so in order to mobilise others to contentious action. The framework is less useful for understanding the negotiation of meaning as a symbolic practice that is constitutive of political subjectivities. Although framing theory affirms the significance of symbols, it conflates them with strategic frames and does not investigate them in their own right. This leaves a gap in understanding the expressive, subjective dimension of political agency and representational practice.

3.4 Theories of Resistance

The final approach to understanding the dynamic relationship between political agency and structure is contained within theories of resistance. What I label here the 'resistance literature' is a broad body of work that is interdisciplinary in its theoretical underpinnings and empirical focus, encompassing feminist theory, post-colonial theory and post-structuralist approaches (Foucault 1965, 1977; Sewell 1999; Hauptmann 2004; Hollander and Einwohner 2004; Mouffe 2005; Stahler-Sholk et al 2007; Tripp 2013; Vinthagen and Johansson 2013; Courpasson and Vallas 2016).

The resistance literature has engaged critically with the concept of 'political agency' in the process of investigating acts of resistance. Resistance has been defined as 'a politics of contention on a more fundamental scale' (Tripp 2013: 4) involving

‘active efforts to oppose, fight, and refuse to cooperate with’ modes of control (Proffitt 1996: 25). Writing of resistance as a politically agentic action has tended to involve an expanded understanding of what is ‘political’, going beyond formal opposition to particular policies and denoting a realm of conflictual power relations (Scott 1990; Rubin 1996; Nash 2001; Hauptmann 2004; Hollander and Einwohner 2004; Slater 2004; Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Lyons 2010). As summarised by Bice Maiguashca (2013: 120), ‘By adding the descriptor “political” to the notion of agency, one draws attention to a particular kind of collective action which reflects a process of *contestation* and embodies a challenge to existing authorities and structures of power’. Acts of resistance, by contesting power, are in this sense a prime embodiment of political agency, and political agency encompasses – but is not limited to – acts of resistance.

In the precursor to their discussion of women’s resistance in Togo, Charles Heller and Branwen Jones offer a succinct definition of political agency, and of the relationship between agency and structure:

We conceive of political agency as *the capacity to take part in the struggle to define the modalities of life in common* (2013: 166 – authors’ emphasis).

This definition of political agency – which also contains an understanding of structure - can be partitioned into three constituent parts: definitional capacity, modalities of life, and struggle. The following discussion will unpack these three qualities, indicating their respective salience within the broader resistance literature and outlining their significance for answering the research question.

The first aspect of Heller and Jones’ definition is that political agency comprises a capacity to ‘define’. This immediately demarcates political agency as a

representational practice: ‘a kind of social and semiotic facility’ involving ‘the degree to which one can control the expression of a sign’ (Cockleman 2007: 375). In this regard, agency is understood as a practice that is negotiated and constructed, rather as a fixed status or position: it is contingent, capable of emergence and retreat, ‘ongoing and in process’ (Featherstone 2008: 6). Indeed, it has even been argued that agency is present in the ways in which people ‘inhabit’ particular norms and systems of meaning, because this too involves some re-inscription of those definitions and representations (Mahmood 2005: 15).

The resistance literature emphasises that practices of articulation and representation construct political subjectivities (Kurik 2016: 56). The ability to ‘define’ and classify, to influence the way in which people perceive the world, and to create categories of inclusion and difference, is powerful not just because of its social impact, but because it empowers identities (Spivak 1988; Oliver-Smith 1991; Staheli 1999; Takhar 2013; Kurik 2016). As a result, imposed representations, or ‘symbolic practices of power’, undoubtedly ‘interfere with people’s political “subjectivities”, with their sense of themselves as political persons’ (Wedeen 1999: 81). This insight usefully extends the claims of multi-institutional politics theory. Multi-institutional theory states that systems of meaning can constitute identities, but the resistance literature reverses this premise by arguing that representational practices can re-amplify subjectivities by enlarging the sphere of social actors’ enablements (Agha 2007: 388). By drawing attention to the significance of representational activity for political subjectivities, the resistance literature also moves us beyond a notion of ‘the self-controlled, rational political subject’ that underpins structuralist theories of social movements (Maiguashca 2013: 119), and even pervades, as I argue above, the methodological positioning of constructivist framing theories.

Secondly, what is being defined are ‘the modalities of life in common’: a term that denotes the social practices and power relations that function as ‘norms’ within a particular cultural context (see Scott 1990: 57). The cultural environment is constituted of material and symbolic authority, and representational practices derive their significance principally from the structural context in which they are located (Flowerdew 1997; Hoy 2004; Cockleman 2007; Courpasson and Vallas 2016). The people who contest systems of signification are in turn constructed by the very world in which such systems proliferate (Ortner 1997: 8). In this sense, this concept of ‘modalities of life’ coheres well with the multi-institutional politics literature.

However, resistance theories, by focusing specifically on oppressive structures, contain additional insights about the way in which authoritarianism shapes practices of representation. Lisa Wedeen (1999) in her study of Syria under Hafiz al-Asad, argues that authoritarian regimes rely extensively on symbolic performances in order to impose a dominant system of meaning on society, even if those meanings are palpably disingenuous. As a result, symbolic displays generate systems of meaning that are pervasive and replicable, but are nevertheless not *believable*. One of the main ways in which authoritarian regimes constitute the ‘rules of the game’ – to use institutionalist terminology (Friedland and Alford 1991) – is by creating an official, prescriptive grammar, or rhetorical universe, that is reproduced by individuals and groups. This grammar features a slipperiness of language that enables the presentation of half-truths, the assimilation of inconvenient factual truths into an overarching narrative, and ‘50-60 sentences that most people are fluent in’, and which comprise the ‘rhetorical formulae’ for speaking about the regime (Wedeen 1999: 40). The concept of a reproducible but incongruous institutional logic distinguishes this theory of resistance from multi-institutional politics theory: the latter equates the

pervasiveness of institutional meaning with ‘normalcy’ or the accepted order of things. Instead, in the case of Syria, the reproduction of these practices is clearly accompanied by a ‘shared condition of unbelief’ (Wedeen 1999: 121).

Finally, this process of defining the modalities of life in common is a ‘struggle’ (Heller and Jones 2013: 133), and the definitional sphere is a fundamentally ‘conflictual’ (Haugaard 1997) domain of interaction, involving contestation between political actors and the socio-historical structures in which they are located (Maiguashca 2013). As with framing theory, this understanding qualifies the durability of structural power by suggesting that it contain the seeds of conflict. However, the notion of ‘struggle’ makes it clear that the strategic ‘resonance’ of cultural meanings is not sufficient to enforce change, but that existent meanings may need to be more radically contested if new definitions are to take root (Weedon 1987).

According to the resistance literature, the struggle over meaning is magnified in significance when it takes place publically rather than privately. The public replication of dominant meanings tends to reinforce power relations by abiding with an oppressor’s terms of engagement, even if actors are struggling to define their own meanings privately (Scott 1990: 67; Vinthagen and Johansson 2013: 37). Everyday contestation can and does undermine power, but it is heterogenic and contingent, and does not always present itself as resistance (Vinthagen and Johansson 2013: 1-2). In contrast, moments of open struggle – described as ‘flash-in-the-pan’ moments (Scott 1990: 203) can be more fundamentally transformative of both meanings and political subjectivities (Tarrow 1993a; Wedeen 1999; Vinthagen and Johansson 2013; Juris and Sitrin 2016). An open or public struggle can transform meanings because it possesses punitive ramifications: the contestation over meaning can enable weaker people to ‘demand responsibility and accountability’ from the dominant power (Scott

1990: 51). It is through simultaneously contesting meanings and demanding accountability that political actors experience ‘personal authentication’, ‘fulfilment and satisfaction’, and ‘recaptured human dignity’ (Scott 1990: 208-9).

The above discussion outlined the three central dimensions of political agency, as captured by the resistance literature: ‘definition’, ‘struggle’, and ‘the modalities of life in common’. One final, overarching insight that pervades the resistance literature is that the process of contesting dominant representations can potentially instate new relations of domination (Foucault 1977, 1978). This occurs because conceptual systems are inevitably shared (Wedeen 1998: 85), and because ‘systemic power relations are “internalised” at the individual level, shaping our sense of self and our future possibilities’ (Maiguashca 2013: 127). As a result, practices of resistance use the tools they condemn (Vesser 1989) and ‘generate their own exclusions, hierarchies and dominations’ (Juris and Sirtrin 2016: 32), thereby potentially ‘dividing the world into binary opposites’ (Tripp 2013: 12). Thus, scholars should avoid romanticising the representational practices of the downtrodden, and recognise the intersectionality between power and contestation (Abu-Lughod 1990; Sharp et al 2000).

Due to the reciprocal relationship between power and contestation, the transformation of a dominant system is difficult to achieve (Wedeen 1999). David Jefferess (2008) supplies a way out of this impasse, arguing that opposition to a definitional system of meaning can only be transformative when it moves beyond rejection, to an active articulation of alternative power relations. If contestation is simply seen as a Manichean dichotomy between actors and structure, as it customarily is in the resistance literature, then the identities inscribed by the dominant system will simply be reinforced (Jefferess 2008: 14-15). Consequently, Jefferess goes beyond the idea of resistance-as-opposition/subversion in order to present the notion of

resistance-as-transformation, understood as ‘freedom to’ rather than simply ‘freedom from’ (Jefferess 2008: 181). An alternative set of meanings, practices and relationships have to be imagined and ultimately constructed for such contestation to be transformative (Juris and Sitrin 2016: 40).

The principal strength of the resistance literature is in outlining the semiotic and conflictual relationship between political agency and existent structures of meaning. This constitutes a meaningful expansion to the two aforementioned theories. It develops the multi-institutional understanding of ‘structure’ by arguing that authoritarian or oppressive systems of meaning can impose dominant understandings through generating rituals of compliance, rather than belief. Secondly, it proposes that new meanings must not only ‘resonate’ with existent understandings, as framing theory delineates, but generate an alternative set of representations, if political agency is to emerge as a radical force. Finally, the literature emphasises that by reconstituting systems of meaning, political agents also constitute their individual and collective political subjectivities. Although framing theory touches on the significance of political subjectivities, it does not develop this into a cohesive framework.

A distinctive insight developed by the resistance literature is the tight imbrication of agency and structure. Multi-institutional politics theory affirms that agency is contained within structure: structures of meaning are not situated in exteriority to political actors, but are reinforced through their practices, norms and routines (Smith 1987, 1990). Resistance theories flip this understanding by suggesting that structure is also contained within agency: agentive challenges to dominant meanings contain exclusionary categorisations and power practices (Maiguascha 2013). This looped understanding suggests the need for researchers to be reflexive in their analysis of agency, to be attuned to re-perpetuations of power, and to

differentiate between ‘resistance as subversion’ and ‘resistance as transformation’ (Jefferess 2008).

A limitation of the resistance literature emerges in its conception of ‘the political’ as an arena of conflict. This understanding is largely fruitful, but it can lead to a dichotomous contrast between politics as an ‘institutionalized arena of the political system’ and the political ‘as a type of conflictual relation that can develop in any arena of the social’ (Slater 2004: 22). This view assumes that ‘the political system’, understood as state institutions, is identical to ‘institutions’ in general. In fact, and as the multi-institutional politics literature indicates, the term ‘institution’ can be broadened to refer to any supraorganisational pattern of activity that contains a symbolic system of meaning (Friedland and Alford 1991: 232). I suggest that using the term ‘institution’ remains theoretically useful. It does not signify a retreat to the formal policymaking arena, but can still encompass a conflictual relation within a particular social arena.

3.5 Theoretical Framework of the Thesis

The purpose of this theoretical framework is to facilitate a critical analysis of political agency prior to and during moments of open contestation. It applies and integrates relevant typologies and tools emerging from the three frameworks reviewed above: multi-institutional politics theory, framing theory, and resistance theories. Having outlined the strengths and limitations of each body of literature, this theoretical model draws together the most relevant elements for answering the research question, whilst ensuring epistemological coherence.

This theoretical framework conceptualises political agency as a representational capacity that shapes and contests structural configurations of power and meaning. It disaggregates the study of political agency into three parts:

1. The delineation of a prevailing ‘configuration of power’ within a particular institutional context, comprising a system of meanings and an ordering of reality.

In a study of agency, it is critical to begin with a conceptualisation of the structural status quo. Multi-institutional theory describes ‘structure’ as locatable within the material and symbolic practices of specific institutions, and as perpetuated through ‘institutional logics’. This understanding views structure as invested with meaning, and as a shaping, even determinant force on political agency. All three of the theoretical frameworks indicate that dominant meanings, symbols and categorisations constitute political identities and subjectivities. In turn, political actors can contribute to the retrenchment of these dominant meanings by re-performing institutional rituals and routines, such that they become imbedded into everyday social experience.

In this understanding of structure, I emphasise that institutional meanings shape ‘publically political’ personhood. This is a slight modification to multi-institutional politics theory, which emphasises that actors’ identities and subjectivities are constituted by institutional meanings that they come to ‘believe’ in. I adapt multi-institutional theory with reference to the resistance literature, which argues that authoritarian and oppressive structures can impose meanings and practices that are covertly recognised as disingenuous. Thus, by asserting that institutional practices shape ‘public’ subjectivities, there is room to understand the retrenchment of meaning

and the performance of ritual as borne out of acts of compliance, rather than belief. The resultant dynamic arguably remains the same – the affirmation of dominant meanings – but the relationship between agency and structure can be understood in a more nuanced way. It permits scope for analysing subtle forms of ‘everyday’ political contestation that overtly affirm power, but covertly subvert it. It also facilitates the analysis of authoritarian regimes, which rely extensively on rituals and imagery in order to impose a dominant pattern of meaning onto society.

Having conceptualised the structural status quo, and the way in which it customarily shapes political subjectivities, this framework branches out to conceptualising political agency during moments of open contestation in two ways.

- 2a. The emergence of contentious political agency as a representational and strategic response to this system of meaning.

Drawing on social movement framing theory, this aspect of the framework understands agency as a strategic and representational response to a particular configuration of meaning. Contentious political agency is strategic in two respects: a) it draws on ‘resources’ of meaning prevalent within the structural status quo in the process of challenging it and, b) it does so in order to attain instrumental political goals, such as collective mobilisation. It is ‘representational’ in the sense that it is articulated through the creation of rhetorical ‘collective action frames’ by political actors.

Collective action frames are a prime embodiment of strategic political agency because they entail an active process of narrative construction around a particular cause. They involve and demonstrate a representational capacity: the demarcation of

particular injustices, the framing of solutions, and the generation of vocabularies of motive around which other political actors (and the societal group in question) can unite. Most importantly, they build on or refer to the aforementioned system of meanings through a process of ‘frame resonance’. This involves the selection of salient meanings or understandings within a particular semiotic system in order to mobilise other political actors.

- 2b. The emergence of contentious political agency as a representational and symbolic response to this system of meaning.

Drawing on theories of resistance, this final part of the framework conceptualises political agency as a representational and symbolic response to a dominant system of meaning, in parallel to the conceptualisation of agency as strategic. It is ‘representational’ in that, once again, it emerges through the construction of meanings, narratives and particular understandings of social reality. However, it is ‘symbolic’ in that these representations are not here analysed as an instrumental force, or as targeted towards achieving tangible political outcomes, but as significant for their transformation of individual and collective political subjectivities, and of the symbolic system they negotiate as a whole.

Whereas strategic framing seeks ‘resonance’ with some aspects of an existent configuration of meaning, symbolic contestation seeks to comprehensively challenge its other dimensions. The distinction pertains to the way in which new representations are situated *in relation to* dominant understandings. Political subjectivities emerge when symbolic contestation undertakes two consecutive processes: the subversion of

exclusionary meanings, followed by the creation of an alternative system of meaning that empowers actors and reimagines previously-set hierarchies of power.

However, a degree of reflexivity must be built into this understanding of agency as symbolic contestation. The resistance literature stresses that even transformed imaginaries may manifest an internal hierarchy of dominance or exclusion. The analysis of radical representations must be accompanied by an active investigation of the ways in they inscribe their own institutional logics. This should be analysed, not as occurring in the aftermath of contention, but as potentially imbedded in representational activities.

To summarise, this theoretical model develops a two-pronged understanding of political agency as an instrumental and symbolic representational practice. It is instrumental in that it seeks material goals attendant from contesting a structure of meaning. It is symbolic in that it undertakes the alteration of this system of meaning, and the transformation of political subjectivities in the process. Above all, it is historically emergent, situated in relation to an overarching and constitutive configuration of meaning.

Methodology and Research Design

This chapter will outline the methodology of the thesis. This has sought to operationalise the multidisciplinary theoretical model outlined in the previous chapter, while retaining epistemological coherence. It outlines the rationale for selecting the Libyan uprising, of all Arab Spring occurrences, as a case study of open contestation under authoritarianism, before specifying the method for the collection and analysis of empirical material, and the manner in which issues pertaining to research ethics and validity were identified and resolved.

4.1 Case Selection of Libya

In this thesis, Libya has been selected as a case of both authoritarianism and of popular contestation during the 2011 Arab uprisings. In the broadest sense, a case has been defined as ‘a well-defined aspect of a historical episode that the investigator selects for analysis’ (George and Bennett 2005: 17). The sustained focus on a particular historical episode generates a set of expectations about the research: for instance, the expectation that such studies possess internal validity, a deep scope of proposition and concentrated data availability (Gerring 2007: 38). However, case study research is frequently associated with the scientific method, where the role of the case study is to enable generalisations through the testing of hypotheses. In this

view, case studies are most useful in shedding light on a larger ‘population’ or class of cases (Gerring 2007: 20) or in generalising to theoretical propositions (Yin 2009: 15).

At this juncture, it is important to specify the way in which Libya is deployed as a ‘case’ in this thesis. The scientific method does permit the case study a role in exploratory research, and in line with this understanding, the thesis will seek to develop broad insights about the nature of political agency and symbolic contestation that can be applied and investigated in similar contexts (Gerring 2007: 40). In the context of study research, such an approach has been described in the social science research literature as a ‘trade-off’ between ‘high internal validity and good historical explanations of particular cases versus making generalizations that apply to broad populations’ (George and Bennett 2005: 22).

However, this thesis does not seek to represent its central contributions as stemming from causal inferences or from generalisability, nor does it set out to attain such outcomes. This stems from the constructivist orientation underpinning the theoretical model, which, while comprising neither a theory nor methodology, ‘does enable and constrain our research designs and our choice of the tools in making our case’ (Kratochwil 2008: 88). In contrast to the scientific method, the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm – as defined by Michael Burawoy - deploys a case in order to reveal the essential nature of society at large and to understand the case, not to generalise from it; it searches for ‘societal significance’ rather than ‘statistical significance’ (in Small 2009: 20). As a result, strategic and symbolic meaning making practices are investigated as intersecting phenomena rather than as distinct and measurable variables. As indicated in Chapter 3, this is a conscious deviation from the claim that ‘cultural factors...can be grouped, counted and their influence analysed’ (Johnston 2009: 6), and moves towards the view of culture as an

institutional schema that shapes social interactions in ways that are symbolic as well as material (Polletta 2004).

Because this thesis adheres to some of the stated methodological tenets of political science research, it is important to outline the basis on which the ‘case’ of Libya has been selected, amongst other instances of Middle East authoritarianism and contestation. Firstly, the case of Libya has been selected theoretically (LeCompte and Schensul 1999: 158), partly based on the fact that it can – in some respects - be termed a classic ‘case’ of a repressive authoritarian regime, which underwent an instance of rapid and open political contestation in 2011. The considerable variety of authoritarian regime types in the Middle East, and variations in their distribution of power, has admittedly rendered it difficult to supply a general definition of this category or to deductively apply typological classifications (Stacher 2012; Hinnebusch 2014). Indeed, Brynen et al (2012: 2) have argued that ‘we are far from convinced that there was or is a single Arab authoritarianism; rather, there is an array of political settings with histories, structural conditions, and dynamics that share both similar and strikingly dissimilar characteristics’.

Nevertheless, there are recurrent traits that are said to underpin authoritarian regimes. Libya has been classified as one of eight Arab republics – the others being Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, Syria and Tunisia, and Sudan – all of which shared certain commonalities: a similarly structured coercive apparatus, centralized leadership, and a system of economic management underpinned by cronyism and the distribution of benefits to networks of support (Sasoon 2016). The coexistence of monopolised, personal rule with the provision of material benefits to loyal clients has been described as ‘neo-patrimonialism’: a central concept in the analysis of authoritarianism. Neopatrimonial regimes have been defined as:

hybrid political systems in which the customs and patterns of patrimonialism co-exist with, and suffuse, rational-legal institutions. As with classic patrimonialism, the right to rule in neopatrimonial regimes is ascribed to a person rather than to an office... The chief executive undermines the effectiveness of the nominally modern state administration by using it for systematic patronage and clientelist practices in order to maintain political order. Moreover, parallel and unofficial structures may well hold more power and authority than the formal administration (Bratton and van de Walle 1997: 62).

To extend this definition, 'neopatrimonial regimes are "neo" because they do not rely on traditional forms of legitimation or on hereditary success' (Snyder 1992: 396). In the context of case study research, it is important not to equate authoritarian rule in general with neo-patrimonialism, or to suggest that a legal-rational bureaucracy cannot exist within an authoritarian regime (Erdmann 2013). The concept does, however, retain considerable applicability when studying authoritarianism in the Arab world. Studies of authoritarian regime maintenance in the region have demonstrated the way in which authoritarian regimes, from the 1950s onwards, widened elite contestation (co-optation) in order to narrow mass inclusion (Owen 2004; Schlumberger 2007; Stacher 2012; Hinnebusch 2014; Sassoon 2016). Patron-client relations were systematically deployed in order to mobilise and incorporate individuals into state organisations (Stacher 2012: 40), such that, in the Arab uprisings, 'all the republics were neo-patrimonial', albeit to different extents (Hinnebusch 2014). Neo-patrimonialism has even been described as a pervasive social phenomenon that can be used to account for the lack of an active civil society in the region (Barakat 1993).

In accordance with this definition, Libya can be described as a ‘typical case’ of neopatrimonial authoritarianism: one that exemplifies ‘a typical set of values, given some general understanding of a phenomenon’ (Gerring 2007: 91). Libya, as a single resource-based economy with a large public sector, is one of the least-diversified economies in the world (St. John 2013: 93). Its significant oil rents have historically been used by the country’s elites in order to attract regime support and to offset political and economic grievances with material incentives, as evidenced in the spending patterns of the Qadhafi regime, which largely extended the distributive mechanisms originated by the monarchy (St. John 2008: 66). The Qadhafi regime also created and maintained other patronage networks, promoting its clients – including local tribes and families - to the inner circles of the government, bureaucracy, security and armed forces, even at the expense of national and institutional loyalty (Achcar 2013: 167). For instance, the security sector was largely governed by the logic of patrimonialism and was not subject to civilian control (Vandewalle 2008: 235), with officers perpetually rotated in order to avoid the bond between officer and soldier becoming too strong (Michaels 2014). The Qadhadhfa, Qadhafi’s home tribe located in the region of Sirte, and other tribes perceived to be supportive of the regime, received a large share of the country’s resources and investments, which were shielded from public scrutiny (Mekouar 2016: 55).

However, although Libya can be termed a ‘typical case’ of authoritarian governance among other Arab republics, sharing in their neopatrimonial characteristics, it also presents as somewhat of a ‘deviant case’. Deviant cases are those that are of ‘surprising value and are in turn investigated for their theoretical anomalies’ (Gerring 2007: 107). It has been noted that, in its system of governance, Libya possessed ‘fundamental differences from other authoritarian regimes’,

including the Arab republics, stemming from their divergent historical patterns of political development (Sassoon 2016: 70). At the heart of this divergence is what Dirk Vandewalle (1998; 2006; 2008; 2012a; 2012b) has described as the pursuit of a deliberate policy of ‘statelessness’ in Libya, throughout the twentieth-century but particularly following the seizure of power by Qadhafi in 1969. Partly due to the brief and oppressive nature of Libya’s experience with colonialism, and partly due to the proliferation of tribal support structures, Qadhafi was ‘liberated from conventional notions of the state’ (Davis 1987: 58). States are normally defined through their organisational capacity to make strategic choices, adopt particular solutions to problems, and make effective interventions (Friedland and Alford 1991: 242). However, Qadhafi’s *Jamahiriya* did not set out to do any of those things. Conventional questions at the heart of modern political systems, such as the gathering of revenues, the need to develop institutional capabilities, and the necessity of political compromise, were not accorded any importance by Qadhafi (Vandewalle 2012b: 190).

Moreover, the Qadhafi regime was particularly repressive in its systematic destruction of civil society, and in its dismantlement of independent unions, civic organisations and any associations with political overtones. Authoritarian regimes in Tunisia and Egypt ‘possessed strong social institutions, such as trade unions, national conscription army, civil society, *ulama* and urban intelligentsias’, who could articulate some form of dissent (Pack 2013b: 5), while in the Maghreb, ‘show democracies’ in countries such as Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco all witnessed alliances between the government and civil actors, albeit at the expense of freedom (Garon 2003: 3). Throughout the Arab autocracies, it was common to witness multidimensional restructurings of power between political opponents and the state

(Lust-Okar 2005), or what Albrecht (2010: 18) has defined as ‘competitive interactions with the incumbents of a political regime based on a minimum degree of mutual acceptance’. In contrast, such power relations and alliances were not tolerated in Libya, which did not – unlike other neo-patrimonial regimes – possess even a written constitution. As argued by George Joffé (2006: 117) the Libyan political vision denied any civil activism outside that sanctioned by the Qadhafi regime, and it never adopted the stance of being a ‘liberalized autocracy’ that both tolerated and controlled civil society initiatives. Qadhafi’s condemnation of political parties as dictatorial instruments paved the way for a committee-congress system of government that purportedly facilitated direct democracy, and was doctrinally based on the premise of ‘mass rule’ (Khalil 2014: 95). In practice, it enabled Qadhafi to govern unofficially as leader and guide of the revolution (St. John 1987: 136).

The Qadhafi regime’s attempt to create a new species of administrative and political structure has led Roger Owen (2004: 55) to argue that, by the early 1980s, ‘the structure of the Libyan state showed considerable differences from that to be found anywhere else in the Middle East,’ at odds with both single party regimes and those under monarchical rule. It also ‘rendered meaningful comparison with the rest of the Maghreb states increasingly difficult’ (Willis 2012: 5).

Subsequently, Libya continued to differ from other Arab countries in its approach towards state-managed political and economic liberalisation. From the late 1980s, and again in the aftermath of the September 2011 terrorist attacks, countries such as Egypt and Tunisia underwent a process of ‘opening up’, instigating a process of *infitah* (limited market-based reforms) and toying with the ideals of free markets and democratisation (Brynen et al 2012: 5). In the decade prior to the Arab uprisings, Libya partially moved away from isolationism, witnessing an increase in private

sector activity and attempting to undertake institutional reforms. In 2003, Qadhafi's son Saif al-Islam emerged as a key interlocutor, establishing the National Economic Development Board (NEDB) which was tasked with drawing up the country's market liberalisation reforms (Bartu 2015: 36). Media liberalisation reforms led by Saif al-Islam included the establishment of the newspapers *Ouya* and *Quryna* in 2007, which permitted some degree of criticism to be directed at government corruption (Dizard et al 2011: 353).

However, the process of liberalisation, most notably including the attempt to draft a constitution, was repeatedly met with firm resistance from regime hardliners. The technocrat prime minister Shukri Ghanem, a proponent of liberalisation and privatisation, was removed in 2006 (Vandewalle 2012b: 201), and in November 2010, then prime minister al-Baghdadi al-Mahmoudi shut down all of Saif's reform-oriented media outlets, followed by the arrest of 22 journalists affiliated with them (Mezran and Knecht 2015: 83). Thus, there was some economic reform, but no substantive attempt at any political reform, even cosmetic (St. John 2008). Ultimately, it has been argued, any practical move towards representative democracy or introduction of a market economy would have undermined Qadhafi's political power base and entire framework of governance, which rested on highly developed patronage networks (St John 2014: 135).

Libya's neopatrimonial system thus resembles other authoritarian regimes, while its distinctive political and historical trajectory sets its mode of governance apart from the other republics that experienced regime-challenging protests during the Arab uprisings. And yet, I do not believe that we should simply classify Libya as an anomalous 'sultanistic' regime, in contrast with other Arab autocracies (Stepan and Linz 2013). Sultanism has been situated as an extreme variant of neopatrimonialism:

‘autocracies whose guidance rests on the whims of a supreme leader...power, corruption and plunder are concentrated in a small circle dependent on the leader’s beneficence’ (Johnston 2015: 621). However, this definition generates a tendency to completely neglect institutions altogether and to focus simply on the near-complete personal discretion of leaders and their ideologies (Chehabi and Linz 1998). Instead, I argue that the *Jamahiriya*, as with other authoritarian regimes, can still be analysed as an institution in its management of material and symbolic sources of power, even if its political system of governance operated in a distinctive way.

The analysis of Libya will focus on the periods both prior to and during the Libyan uprising. In the following chapter, the thesis will present an analysis of the Qadhafi regime’s practices of domination, and the way in which they shaped political agency in the *Jamahiriya*. This is modelled on multi-institutional politics theory, which indicates the importance of first delineating the ‘institutional logic’ within a particular configuration of power, before exploring the way in which its meanings are engaged with, contested and transformed during moments of open contestation. Chapter 5 does not set out to offer a historical account of Libyan politics under Qadhafi, of which there are many such valuable studies already (El-Fathaly and Palmer 1980; Anderson 1986; Davis 1987; St. John 1987; El-Kikhia 1998; Vandewalle 1998, 2006; Wright 2010; Pargeter 2012), but to proceed thematically, delineating the *Jamahiriya*’s material and symbolic practices of power, in accordance with the theoretical framework, while comparing these practices with other Arab autocracies, in line with the intended contribution to the literature on Middle East politics.

In Chapters 6 and 7, the timeframe for the analysis of the 2011 Libyan uprising is principally from the onset of online mobilisation for protests in January 2011, to the

takeover of Tripoli by opposition forces on 21 August. This circumscription is to some extent synthetic: it is difficult to analyse the Libyan uprising as a ‘spatially delimited phenomenon’ (Gerring 2007: 9). For instance, the fighting between pro and anti-Qadhafi forces continued in towns such as Bani Walid, long after the proclaimed ‘liberation’ date. However, this period of time nevertheless encapsulates the most significant juncture in the Libyan uprising, during which revolutionary ‘framing’ practices – articulations of the objectives, motivations, and symbols of the revolution – were most prevalent and novel. In line with the theoretical framework, if the moment of ‘open insubordination represents a dramatic contradiction of the smooth surface of euphemized power’ (Scott 1990: 56), this timeframe of the 17 February uprising constitutes such a radical moment of public contestation.

4.2 Methodological Approach

The epistemological perspective adopted in this thesis is a constructivist one, in that it adopts two commitments that have been described as central to the constructivist mode: the view that ‘agency matters in social life’, and the conviction that ‘the notions that actors have about their actions matter’ (Kratochwil 2008: 86). This centralisation of agency and of political subjectivities undergirds the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 3. In accordance with this perspective, the overarching methodological approach I deploy is an interpretivist one. Interpretivist approaches, as outlined by Clifford Geertz (1973: 3-4) seek not to arrive at laws but to search for meanings in their study of ‘culture’, or semiotics. They ‘start with the insight that to understand actions, practices and institutions, we need to grasp the relevant meanings, beliefs and preferences of people involved’ (Bevir and Rhodes 2004: 130). The

interpretive approach involves a process of ‘sorting out’ established symbols and structures of signification, while connecting the description of symbols to specific events and occasions that articulate social relationships and hierarchies.

As conceptualised by Geertz (1973: 30) the interpretive method is, by nature, a disorderly process, in which objectivity cannot be attained. However, he nevertheless urges practitioners not to descend into ‘intuitionism and alchemy’ or to let their sentiments run loose. This caution is reiterated by John Gerring (2007: 7), who suggests that case study ‘interpretation’ is all too often comprised of quasi-mystical, imaginative qualities. The following chapters, which seek to investigate both the strategic and semiotic components of meaning making practices, and to do so with reference to the *Jamahiriya*’s institutional logic, attempt to avoid Gerring’s impasse in two ways. Firstly, the interpretivist methodology is situated alongside a deductive analytical approach that deploys the tools of ‘framing theory’ in Chapter 5. Social movement documents were deductively coded in accordance with Snow and Benford’s theoretical framework, in order to describe the way in which Libyan activists generated strategic, collective understandings. Framing thus served as the starting point for interpreting meaning making practices in accordance with the theoretical principle of ‘frame resonance’, and in relation to the *Jamahiriya*’s institutional logic.

Secondly, the constructivist perspective indicates that terms and concepts can only be understood ‘through the rules by which they are constituted...it is not observations but shared understandings that constitute the relevant facts’ (Kratochwil 2008: 93). Chapter 7 explores the symbolic, representational practices of Libyan actors during the uprising, but the act of semiotic contestation and affirmation within revolutionary cultural productions is interpreted against the backdrop of the shared

understandings, or ‘cultural schemas’ (Sewell 1992) communicated and imbedded into social life by the *Jamahiriyah*. As argued by Wedeen (1999) analysis of transgressive practices requires a corresponding identification of the logic of a particular system of domination. Thus, the process of interpretation is not illusive but dialogic, involving a mediation of the symbiotic relationship between oppressive authoritarian and subversive revolutionary systems of meaning. There remains, nevertheless, an element of subjectivity in the description, comparison and appraisal of symbolic practices.

4.3 Data Gathering Methods

The methods used in this research were all of a qualitative nature, and therefore suited to generating rich, in-depth information about the way in which political actors perceive and interact with the world around them (Miles and Huberman 1994; Fraser 1995; Adcock and Collier 2001; Auerbach and Silverstein 2003; Maxwell 2012; Lindekilde 2014; Yin 2016). Qualitative methods have been seen to add a missing ‘subjective’ component to conventional empirical-analytic research, by enabling researchers to document actors’ perspectives, motives and self-understandings (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003: 22). As indicated in Chapter 3, the theoretical framework centralises meaning making practices. In turn, and if meaning is the condition in which a person’s life, or significant events in it, ‘make sense’ (Wuthnow 1987: 35), then it has been argued that ‘qualitative research *is* the study of meaning, and this requires access to the subjective interpretations people attach to their objective circumstances’ (Packer 2010: 52 – author’s emphasis). The use of qualitative research methods is also appropriate for the interpretivist orientation of

this thesis, in which ‘descriptive validity’ or ‘authenticity’ (Maxwell 2012) is considered to be the determinant parameter for evaluating the strength of the inferences made, over generalisability.

The research methods deployed in this thesis can be categorised into three main types: semi-structured, in-depth interviews with Libyan activists and political figures; ‘social movement material’ from the 17 February uprising, spanning media statements, movement communiqués, slogans and cultural productions such as music and graffiti; and archival material on the Qadhafi regime, including speeches, documents on the institutional-administrative structure of the *Jamahiriya*, iconographic displays such as regime-sanctioned music, and tolerated comedic television programmes. Taken together, these forms of material enabled the analysis of what has been termed ‘the dynamic relationship between texts and their wider social, cultural, and political context’ (Lindekilde 2014: 208). The combination of strategic messaging materials (such as official statements by political actors) and symbolically rich texts (such as cultural productions) was designed to address a two-pronged theoretical framework that focuses on the semiotic and strategic components of rhetorical contestation.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews served as a central research method for this project, and contributed substantially to unpacking the representational and meaning making practices of Libyan activists, and indeed, their rationalisation of these activities. Unlike strictly systematic modes of questioning, this method was particularly valuable for generating unanticipated insights and perspectives (Peabody et al 1990), and for

exploring the values and understandings through which participants perceive and structure their actions (Morris 1991). I conducted 31 interviews with Libyan activists and political figures who were involved– in various dimensions – in the mobilisation effort against the Qadhafi regime. This group comprised a diversity of actors: opposition figures involved in or connected to Libya’s National Transitional Council (NTC); diaspora activists based in the UK, the USA and Canada; and youth protesters who were based in different Libyan cities (Benghazi, Tripoli and Zawiya). Some of the activists I interviewed traversed these categories, travelling from the diaspora to Libya in order to be more directly involved in the revolutionary effort.

As noted by Mario Small (2009: 28), in-depth interviews should not be assessed by the standards of classical statistics, in which bias and representativeness are key metrics of appraisal, but be guided by the principle of ‘saturation rather than representation’. Through the ‘selection’ of interviewees (Stake 1995: 56), I focused on gauging the perspectives of individuals who played a central role in ‘framing’ the Libyan uprising to constituents and bystanders by communicating its grievances and objectives. In line with the agency-centred perspective of the research, I was particularly focused on interviewing actors whose voices and experiences had received little exposure in the media coverage of the uprising. This is not a contradictory endeavour: many of the activists I interviewed, despite playing a prominent role in ‘framing’ the uprising, had deliberately shielded their personal identities from public view in an effort, at the time, to be representative of ‘all Libyans’. Other Libyan activists have narrated their revolutionary experiences in the form of memoirs, interviews and stories, many of which were published in opposition newspapers during this uprising, and this material was used as a secondary consolidating source.

I contacted activists principally through targeted outreach, ‘purposively’ selecting those who would yield relevant but diverse insights for the study (Yin 2016: 93). On occasion, this was followed by snowballing from the initial pool of interviewees, speaking to some activists as an offshoot of existent interviews. The initial subset of activists that I interviewed were already pre-identified as being prominent voices in the revolutionary discursive space - for instance, the founders of the Libyan Youth Movement, and members of the Libyan political opposition under Qadhafi – and I reached out to them using social media outlets and/or email communication. After these interviews, some of them were able to refer me to other activists whom they thought would shed complementary or even different perspectives on the Libyan uprising (for instance, by being located in another city during the events). This approach was particularly fruitful: in particular, the referrals on the basis of ‘difference’ insured that I spoke to a wide demographic of activists, often with different political affiliations, modes of activism and interpretations of what transpired in 2011.

The escalation of instability and outbreak of violence in Libya, which began in August 2014, led the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) to deem travel to Libya unsafe, including the Western region, in which I was initially planning to conduct interviews. This presented an initial barrier to the generation of empirical material, but one that I attempted to offset: the majority of the interviews were held across various UK cities, with activists who were either located in the country or visiting temporarily from Libya; others I conducted in Tunisia, which I travelled to in March and April 2015, and the remainder over Skype or telephone. The interviews themselves constituted substantial discussions, with most around two hours long, and held in either English or Arabic, depending on the interviewee’s preferred language.

There was a common structure to the line of questioning. Interviews unpacked the nature of the individual's political activism in relation to Libya, prior to and during the uprising, and engaged with the way in which their perceptions of that activity emerged and shifted over time. Questions were also adapted based on the insights generated during the course of the interview, and in accordance with my own, pre-researched understanding of their role during the uprising.

While conducting and analysing the interviews, I was attuned to the fact that participants were relaying recollections of past events, and that they were not speaking presently about their activism, as is customarily the case in social movement framing research (Johnston 2002; Valocchi 2005a; Lindekilde 2014). Accounts of past activism are undoubtedly shaped by experiences of current events (Irwin-Zarecka 1994; Olick and Robbins 1998), and – as noted in the Introduction – the current context of political instability in Libya generated a tone of revolutionary disillusionment that saturated the content of some interviews. However, I do not believe it possible or desirable, from a constructivist perspective, to eliminate this subjective dimension and to separate activists' subjective reconstructions of their motivations, from their 'actual' motivations, however contemporaneous the research. As argued by Robert Miller and John Brewer (2003: 191), 'the meanings that people ascribe to their actions may be incomplete, not taking account of deeper motivations, inhibitions or humankind's capacity for self-deception'. In addition, although the current political context in Libya did shape the direction of the interviews, this was consciously incorporated into the questions in an attempt to understand the way in which the aftereffects of activism shape activists' perceptions of their political agency. Because interviews were triangulated with social movement material from 2011, I was also able to situate activists' retrospective interpretations of their motives

with the understandings that were communicated during the revolutionary period itself.

Social Movement Materials

In order to understand the emergence of contentious, representational activity during the Libyan uprising, this thesis relies substantively on what have been termed ‘social movement materials’: a data corpus that includes ‘anything that is written, can be translated into texts, or whose symbolic meaning can be analysed’ (Lindekilde 2014: 209). This includes qualitative material both produced by movement activists or about movement activists, for instance, by the revolutionary media outlets that sprang up during the 2011 Libyan uprising. Due to digitalisation these materials are now available on a much greater scale. Reinoud Leenders (2013: 283) has argued that digitalised storytelling tells powerful, effective and accessible stories of revolution: these stories reflect people’s perceptions, and ‘give us important hints of how people perceive themselves, their conditions, their goals, their tactics, and their opponents’. The spread of social media platforms and the availability of these texts has shifted the challenge from being one of obtaining social movement materials, to one of filtering and selecting them.

Online material was collated into different categories of text. One category comprised statements publicised by both political elites (members of the Libyan NTC) and by diaspora and civil society activists: these took the form of written statements, audio and video interviews and newspaper op-eds. A second category of materials comprised the Arabic media messaging of the Libyan uprising. I collated and manually coded the weekly and fortnightly editions of two revolutionary

newspapers that were published between May and August 2011: *Al-Manarah*, which was printed and distributed across all opposition-controlled territories in Libya from June 2011, and *Mayadeen*, which was distributed in Benghazi from May 2011. I also substantiated this written material with episodes of political programmes that were aired on Libya Al-Ahrar, the main opposition television channel in 2011, and subsequently uploaded onto the video hosting website, YouTube. The third class of materials comprised the cultural productions of the uprising. I transcribed and analysed over 70 revolutionary songs that were produced from January to August 2011, as well as a collection of revolutionary graffiti and artwork, slogans and chants. This latter collection, alongside interviews, formed the central empirical basis for Chapter 7, in which I describe the process of symbolic contestation during the uprising.

Social movement materials, which encompassed both instrumental and expressive texts, enabled a varied appraisal of the manner and extent to which representational practices transformed the Qadhafi regime's construction of social reality. Such material was gathered from a diversity of sources, including an archived version of the official NTC opposition website, Western news outlets, independent Libyan opposition websites, social media platforms and dedicated online portals such as the Libyan Uprising Archive. The scope of this material is vast and the analysis of it in its entirety was far beyond the remit of this study. In some instances, as in the coding of the two revolutionary newspapers, I self-imposed a limit based on theoretical selection: both newspapers have distinctive ideological leanings, and were disseminated in different areas of Libya. In other instances, as with cultural productions and activist statements, I continued to collate and analyse the material

until a saturation point was reached, and the analysis began to yield recurrent insights and understandings.

Qadhafi-era Materials

Another branch of empirical material that I analysed was generated prior to the Libyan uprising, and was targeted at understanding the *Jamahiriya* as a material and symbolic ‘institution’. This included speeches by Qadhafi and his son Saif al-Islam, regime iconography (particularly music) and all available, online episodes of the state-sanctioned television programme *‘They Said It’ (Galooha)*, which was aired intermittently from 1998 to 2005 during the month of Ramadan, and which trod a fine line between regime subversion and affirmation. A limited number of speeches made by Qadhafi were available to view online; others were extensively quoted in a book published by Mohammed Magariaf, the founder of the main opposition group in exile, which I managed to obtain. In addition, I also analysed satirical materials that were developed by Libyan opposition members in exile, and that were uploaded onto websites such as Libya Al-Mostakbal. These materials were bolstered substantively by the interviews, many of which included subjective reflections on life under the *Jamahiriya*, and were supported by studies that have described the operation of Qadhafi’s political system (Vandewalle 2006; Pargeter 2012; Wright 2012), and dynamics of citizen participation and ‘political culture’ in Libya (Al-Werfalli 2011).

Lastly, in addition to these texts, Chapter 5 also examines a series of documents produced for the Libyan government by Adam Smith International, one of the UK’s largest foreign aid contractors, in 2007. Titled ‘Libyan Public Sector Administration Development’, this project scrutinised Libyan government organisations and

institutions, civil service executive structures and the entire process of policymaking in Libya, principally in order to make multiple recommendations for institutional reform. This project provided a valuable insight into the mechanisms through which the ‘formal’ Libyan political system, and the Libyan public sector as a whole, operated –or indeed, failed to operate - in practice. Above all, the chapter interpreted the findings of this avowedly apolitical report, not simply as evidence of civil service failings, but as part of the *Jamahiriya*’s broader institutional dynamics, and the way in which it embedded popular complicity within its material practices of domination.

4.4 Ethics and Research Validity

In the previous section, I outlined some of the ethical challenges pertaining to safety - which posed a barrier to conducting fieldwork in Libya - and the way in which I attempted to mitigate these difficulties. Another ethical issue was encountered in the course of seeking interviewees for my research. My initial objective was to speak to youth in the UK who had travelled in the summer of 2011 to fight alongside Libyan opposition forces, particularly in the Western region and in the Eastern Nafusa mountains. I was advised that such an endeavour posed a risk to the youth involved, many of whom were wary of speaking about their experiences, or refused outright to do so, under the risk of being flagged up as extremists. I decided to close this particular line of investigation, and to focus instead on activists based originally in Libya, or on diaspora youth who had travelled to facilitate revolutionary media operations.

In a similar vein, I chose to anonymise the identities of those who did participate in my research, in order to guarantee their safety. Anonymity in research

has been described as one form of ‘confidentiality’: that of keeping participants’ identities secret to all persons other than the primary researchers (Saunders et al: 2015). It is often ‘taken-for-granted as an ethical necessity’, for instance by the Economic and Social Research’s Council’s (ESRC’s) Framework for Research Ethics (Moore 2012: 333). Protecting participants’ identities can safeguard them from persecution and retaliation for their beliefs and actions (Scott 2004: 244), particularly since we cannot reliably predict the future harm that comes from naming them (Wiles et al 2012: 47). In this thesis, I chose to undertake the most common form of anonymisation, which consists of disguising the personal identities of respondents by assigning them pseudonyms, and concealing other ‘identifying details’ such as the specific nature of their organisational affiliation where it appears throughout the thesis. This was not a simple decision, balanced as it was against the need to respect participants’ wishes to ‘receive recognition’ and be credited for their voices (Grinyer 2002; Giordano et al: 2007). However, I judged it to be a necessary concession, in light of the volatile political context in Libya, and due to the sharing of potentially sensitive information by some interviewees.

Pertaining to the validity of my data, I encouraged issues relating to my own positionality as a Libyan woman, whom activists perceived to be vested in the collective experiences – and political consequences - of the Libyan uprising. It was particularly important for me to be aware of the way in which activists’ narration of their revolutionary experiences was attuned and modified according to the way in which they perceived my identity as a Libyan. It was not uncommon for interviewees to preface the interview by asking which region of Libya I came from, or to gauge my opinions on the current political conflict by enquiring about whether or not I supported the Islamist-leaning General National Congress or secularist-leaning House

of Representatives. I was often asked what I thought of the revolution and its transitional trajectory, and to assign ‘blame’ for the unfolding conflict.

It is difficult to determine the extent to which such queries (and my answers) influenced the veracity and depth of the responses I was given. As outlined in the Introduction, I sought to adopt a reflexive research practice during the data gathering process, in recognition of the principle that researcher objectivity and ‘neutrality’ is an unattainable pursuit (Shacklock and Smyth 1998). It is certainly the case that having shared experiences and identities with certain interviewees encouraged them to open up about ‘our revolution’ and their assessment of it, thereby strengthening my empirical material on the emergence of a collective revolutionary aesthetic. In certain contexts, I was conscious of the need to be politically open-minded and to present myself as being so, but to avoid expostulating at length about my own political views; to attempt to maintain the dialogic spirit of the interviews but without transforming them into a two-way polemic. To some extent, the relevance of my revolutionary positionality to those I interviewed, and to the answers they were willing to supply, indicates the way in which the re-narration of the Libyan uprising has become a particularly contentious process: a point I elaborate upon in the Conclusion.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to outline the underlying methodology of research for this thesis. It began by clarifying the justification for the selection of Libya as a ‘case study’ of authoritarianism, describing the way in which it coheres with the neopatrimonial underpinnings of authoritarian regimes, while diverging in its system of political governance. In order to understand Qadhafi’s regime as a case of

authoritarianism, and of emergent political agency, this thesis deploys and triangulates a range of empirical resources, from interviews with activists to ‘social movement materials’ and Qadhafi-era texts. In parallel, these enabled the analysis of the Qadhafi regime’s logic of practice, and of the strategic and semiotic components of contentious, representational activity. In adopting a primarily interpretivist analytical approach to such materials, the chapter has indicated that the thesis does not align itself with positivist methodologies or with the social scientific method of research, which strives for generalisability and well-defined casual outcomes, but with a constructivist methodology that seek internal validity and in-depth case understanding.

The Libyan *Jamahiriya* as Institution

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will describe the exercise of power in Qadhafi's *Jamahiriya* ('State of the Masses') prior to the Libyan uprising of 2011. It will do so by analysing the *Jamahiriya* as an institution, comprised of both material technologies of control and a system of symbolic organisation. This orientation is grounded in the multi-institutional politics framework, which has conceptualised the material-symbolic underpinning of power and underscored the resultant 'institutional logic' that this creates (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008). If an institutional logic is taken to signify the organising principles of a particular social world (Jackall 1988: 112), then the *Jamahiriya*'s institutional logic mandated the performance of contradiction in the procurement of material subsistence. Through this logic, the *Jamahiriya* routinised the disempowerment of the Libyan populace, shaped publically political identities, and generated political compliance. However, the internal incongruities of this logic enabled Libyans to manoeuvre within its strictures and to act 'as if' (Wedeen 1999) in regards to its symbolic practices.

This chapter is split into three central sections. The first two delineate the *Jamahiriya*'s material practices, consisting of coercive mechanisms and a system of political governance. Coercive practices in the *Jamahiriya* resembled those deployed in other Arab authoritarian regimes, and operated principally through a combination

of repression, co-optation and the symbolic perpetuation of fear. Conversely, the system of political governance was distinctive to the *Jamahiriya*. It was not based on a set of ‘nominally democratic’ (Gandhi 2006) or ‘sultanistic’ (Chehabi and Linz 1998) principles, but constituted ‘the rules of the game’ within which Libyan society operated (Thornton and Ocasio 2008: 112). The system of governance created organisational and institutional disorder, and deployed disorder as a mechanism of material distribution within Libya. Through this system, Qadhafi maintained political control while demobilising and eroding the representational capacity of the Libyan populace.

The final section indicates the way in which these material practices were buttressed by a symbolic order that ‘cluttered’ public space (Wedeen 1999: 157), and that ordered reality by mandating that citizens reaffirm its symbols. The chapter goes on to argue that, despite the dominance of this symbolic order, it did not necessarily generate unwavering ‘belief in the institution’ (Friedland and Alford 1991: 250). Instead, people signalled their agency by exploiting the instabilities inherent within this system of practice, performing its logic while recognising its disingenuousness. Taken as a whole, this chapter aims to illustrate the material and symbolic practices underpinning the *Jamahiriya*’s delimitation of political agency prior to the 2011 uprising.

5.2 Material Control in the *Jamahiriya*: Coercion and Co-optation

On 2 March 1977, in the Libyan city of Sabha, Qadhafi renamed Libya ‘The Great Socialist People’s Libyan Arab *Jamahiriya*’ (*Al-Jamahirriya al-arabiyya al-Libiyya al-sha’abiyya al-ishtirakiyya al-uthma*). This pronouncement was the culmination of

almost a decade of political experimentation by the Libyan leader, that saw him establish and then discard the Egyptian single-party model, the Arab Socialist Union (1971-1973), for being inadequate as an instrument of mass, popular mobilisation (Vandewalle 2006: 105). The *Jamahiriya*, which was to last almost unchanged until the end of Qadhafi's rule, ushered in a system of governance that purportedly vested all political authority in the Libyan people, and was underpinned by two acts: Qadhafi's launch of a 'Cultural Revolution' in the city of Zuwara in 1973, and the publication of Qadhafi's ideological treatise *The Green Book* in 1975 (El-Kikhia 1997: 47). *The Green Book* articulated a 'Third Universal Theory': a conception of individual, national and pan-Arab liberation that comprised an alternative to both communism and capitalism (St. John 1987: 27). The Cultural Revolution, whose primary objective was mass mobilisation and mass participation, served as a practical embodiment of this popular authority.

Arab autocracies have customarily paid lip service to democratic values, despite deploying political pluralism as a survival strategy in practice (Posusney and Angrist 2005). In contrast, Qadhafi eschewed democracy, arguing that representation involves the surrender of natural personal sovereignty, and claiming that party systems and parliaments are 'obsolete structures' that function as instruments of the rich (al-Qadhafi 1980: 11). In place of democracy, the *Jamahiriya* spawned a highly convoluted system of popular representation, embodied in its unicameral legislature, the General People's Congress, and an extensive cluster of local decision-making bodies, the Basic Popular Congresses. This system of formal power has been characterised as politically ineffectual, paling in comparison to informal structures of authority (Vandewalle 2006: 119) and eclipsed by extensive mechanisms of coercion and repression (Sassoon 2016: 71). Alison Pargeter (2012: 105) argues that within a

year of the establishment of the *Jamahiriya*, ‘Qadhafi had effectively rendered its formal political institutions impotent, turning them into little more than a façade’, and controlling them with instruments of repression.

Such accounts partially capture the reality of the *Jamahiriya*’s material authority. The literature on Arab autocracies has emphasised the significance of coercion to the origins and longevity of authoritarian regimes (Bellin 2005; Schlumberger 2007; Svolik 2012; Sasoon 2016). This was similarly the case in the *Jamahiriya*, which was, according to the Libyan dissident Fayez, ‘a regime that lived off security’ from its inception.³ Qadhafi rose to power through the military: deposing the monarchy in a bloodless coup d’état, he formed and was named commander-in-chief of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), which was comprised of 12 ‘Free Officers’ from the Military Academy (El-Kikhia 1997: 39). The RCC was formally abolished with the instatement of the *Jamahiriya*, and Qadhafi swiftly underwent the power trajectory that has been described as the transition from ‘first among equals’ to ‘established dictatorship’ (Svolik 2012: 6). Nevertheless the military remained an important mechanism of control, with four of the original RCC members given prominent positions as head of the army, police and chief of staff (Vandewalle 2006: 79).

The military was a central instrument in the Qadhafi regime’s coercive apparatus, but there was an underlying tension in the way in which it was managed. Military colleagues occupied top positions in the political governance structure, in this respect resembling Egypt, where a large section of the political elite came from the military during the era of Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser (Stacher 2012: 51). In particular, Abdel Salam Jalloud, the deputy chairman of the RCC, was to become one of the

³ Interview with Fayez, exiled anti-regime dissident, 27 January 2016. London.

most prominent figures in the *Jamahiriya*: a ‘roving economic ambassador’ for the Qadhafi regime (Vandewalle 2006: 105). However, a coup attempt led by two RCC members, stemming from a conflict over the country’s ideological direction, was thwarted in August 1975. Following this attempted takeover, the military became subject to tight monitoring (Vandewalle 1998: 83). Qadhafi began to engage in ‘coup-proofing’: a tactic that was designed to avoid a situation in which ‘repressive forces metamorphosize from an obedient servant into a potential political rival’ (Svolik 2012: 15). This was partly achieved by bestowing sensitive army positions to members of his Qadhadhfa tribe (Sassoon 2016: 84), and by selectively distributing resources and investments to other selected tribes, such as the Warfalla and Maghraha (Mekouar 2016: 55). This both fostered rivalries among different tribes and strengthened the regime’s security (Achcar 2013: 167).

In addition to being facilitated by mechanisms of patronage, coup-proofing was also achieved through Qadhafi’s establishment of alternative security structures. Although the *Jamahiriya* originated in a military institution, its coercive authority was ultimately sustained through the creation of an overlapping web of intelligence and security services that reduced Qadhafi’s reliance on the army (Vandewalle 2016: 147). In this respect, the Libyan Army began to resemble that of Iraq and Syria (Sassoon 2016) and arguably the ‘rentier militaries’ of the Gulf monarchies (Hertog 2011) in which counterweight armies commonly functioned as a monitoring mechanism and a parallel support structure for the dictator. Within this expanding security sector, the ‘revolutionary committees’ soon served as the *Jamahiriya*’s central instrument of coercion (Wright 2012: 208). Established in 1976, and growing in prominence between 1979-1987, the revolutionary committees were an alternative to both the formal mechanisms of political governance, which Qadhafi quickly

realised might produce undesirable results, and the army, with its propensity towards revolt. In a speech given in 1977, Qadhafi described the revolutionary committees as the ‘human embodiment of the revolution’: an indispensable part of the *Jamahiriya*’s system of revolutionary emancipation and popular governance:

Human freedom cannot be achieved except with revolution, because revolution is the final answer to the question of freedom, and the revolutionary committees are the instrument of this revolution. And this is the reason why revolutionary committees have been established. They are not traditional political structures that aim to monopolise power, but groups of preachers and missionaries who have embraced *The Green Book*, and its mission of popular sovereignty...⁴

Comprised of individuals carefully selected by Qadhafi and reporting to him directly, the revolutionary committees were described by the regime a ‘suicide squads’, willing to make any sacrifice in order to defend the Revolution (St. John 1987: 134). As with the army, those individuals were often chosen from the Qadhadhfa and interconnected tribes, with Qadhafi assigning his cousin and two brothers to security and intelligence (Sassoon 2016: 123). Thus, and although Qadhafi denied that the revolutionary committees were motivated by or accrued any material benefits, they were in fact managed through the deployment of co-optation, in common with other instruments of control in Arab autocracies. More specifically, where elevating political party members to senior positions is the principal mechanism of co-opting individuals (and the population at large) into the Arab authoritarian status quo (Stacher 2012; Svobik 2012; Sassoon 2016), the revolutionary committees became the equivalent instrument in the *Jamahiriya*. They were effectively a mechanism of patronage, enabling Qadhafi

⁴ Speech by Mu’ammār al-Qadhafi, cited in Mohammed Magariaf, *The Crimes of Libya’s Revolutionary Committees: Who is Responsible for Them?* 27.

to actively engineer and shape his support base by channelling oil revenues towards his allies (Cole and McQuinn 2015: 20).

Other individuals were promoted to the revolutionary committees on the basis of demonstrable political loyalty to the revolution. Huda bin Amer, one of Qadhafi's most conspicuous aides, attained notoriety during the 1984 hanging of student dissident Al-Sadeq Al-Shuwehdy in Benghazi, in which she stepped forward and grabbed onto his legs during the execution. The act earned her a rapid promotion to leader of the Revolutionary Committee in Benghazi, and the clandestine nicknames 'Huda the Executioner' (*Huda al-shannaga*) and 'The Immoral bin Amer' (*Dhalal bin Amer*) in the city of Benghazi, where she was widely reviled.⁵

Qadhafi characterised the revolutionary committees as a 'popular instrument, emerging from within society itself, and internally regulating...they monitor the activities of all members of the revolution, instruct and direct them, and punish them if they deviate from the path of the revolution'.⁶ Thus, the coercive remit of the revolutionary committees was extensive, centred on the 'enforcement of the *Jamahiriya*'s political and ideological goals' through monitoring anti-regime activity, deploying repressive measures against dissenters and enemies of the *Jamahiriya*, and planting informants at every level of society (Sassoon 2016: 7). The revolutionary committees were accorded seemingly arbitrary powers. Immediately following the establishment of the *Jamahiriya*, the revolutionary committees were involved in purges against supporters of non-compliant political ideologies, such as Islamism and Marxism, infiltrating university campuses in an attempt to crack down on their

⁵ Ibzewu, Fathalla. "The City of Benghazi". Libya Al-Mostakbal, 20 March 2009. Available at: <https://goo.gl/Vy55kj>

⁶ Speech by Mu'ammarr al-Qadhafi, cited in Mohammed Magariaf, *The Crimes of Libya's Revolutionary Committees: Who is Responsible for Them?* 27.

promulgation (Hilsum 2012: 70), and participating in the violent suppression of student uprisings (or ‘cleansing’ of universities in Benghazi and Tripoli) in the 1970s.

The domestic influence of the revolutionary committees was bolstered by their capacity, in the 1980s, to undertake the physical liquidation (*al-tasfiya al-jasadiya*) of expatriate Libyan dissidents, whom Qadhafi referred to as ‘stray dogs’ and ‘enemies of the revolution’ (Vandewalle 2006: 122). In authoritarian regimes, exiles are frequently considered a fertile base for oppositional undertakings and tend to lead to the expansion of the regime’s repressive activities abroad (Chehabi and Linz 1998: 25). In particular, the revolutionary committees targeted the National Front for the Salvation of Libya (NFSL), the most prolific opposition movement abroad (Stanik 2003; El-Fathaly 2006; Tawil 2011). The Libyan Ambassador to the UK and the foreign intelligence chief, Moussa Koussa, was suspected to have sanctioned the revolutionary committees’ assassinations of several NFSL members in London in 1980 (Pargeter 2012: 103-105). A spate of subsequent killings, including the murder of NFSL figure Ali Abuzeid in London in 1995, have gone un-investigated but are suspected to be the work of the revolutionary committees.⁷ Consequently, the identification and avoidance of revolutionary committees was considered to be a central challenge for Libyan dissidents living in the diaspora during the 1980s.⁸

The coercive apparatus of the *Jamahiriyah* was laced with symbolic undertones. In his speeches, Qadhafi categorically excluded and censured the identities of who questioned the revolutionary committees, asserting that ‘anyone who holds any resentment towards the revolutionary committees is not one of us, and is sick, and has deficiencies, and needs to review himself’.⁹ In the *Jamahiriyah*, dignified personhood

⁷ Interview with Dania, Benghazi-based journalist and campaigner, 27 August 2015. London.

⁸ Interview with Mustafa, anti-regime dissident and human rights campaigner, 4 March 2015. London.

⁹ Speech by Mu’ammār al-Qadhafi, cited in Mohammed Magariaf, *The Crimes of Libya’s Revolutionary Committees: Who is Responsible for Them?* 32.

and belonging to the ‘revolution’ were only ascribed to those who belonged to, or supported, the work of the revolutionary committees. The regime also deployed symbolism in order to magnify the impact of its repressive activities, The month of April came to involve and signify an annual bout of bloodshed against university students deemed to be involved in anti-regime activity, with public executions taking place in 1977, 1980, 1983 and 1984.¹⁰ To further publicise their impact, hangings were frequently aired on television during the month of Ramadan in the 1980s: a sign that the most spiritual and collective of moments were not beyond the reach of the regime’s terror.¹¹ The use of ‘show trials’ as a public demonstration of the *Jamahiriya*’s coercive capacity resembles the public hangings of spies in Iraq, in which Saddam Hussein’s regime deployed radio and television ‘as potent instruments to bring these proceedings into nearly all Iraqi homes’ (Sassoon 2016: 138).

The most infamous and far-reaching instance of regime repression inside Libya is the Abu Slim massacre on 29 June 1996, where, following a demonstration about prison conditions, the security authorities killed 1170 prisoners in the space of a few hours (Sassoon 2016: 134). In a country where families are large and diffuse, ‘such a massacre touches tens of thousands of people’, particularly in the East of Libya, from which most of the victims originated (Hilsum 2012: 4). The massacre’s symbolic import also extended beyond the act itself due its surreptitious nature: Qadhafi first publically admitted that it took place in a speech in April 2004 (Joffé 2016: 124), Colonel Abdullah al-Sanusi, head of the country’s security since 1992, was widely believed to have borne responsibility for the massacre (Kersten 2016: 189), but this was not verified or publically addressed, even in later attempts by Qadhafi’s son Saif

¹⁰ “So Not to Forget the Victims of Gaddafi in April”. *Libya Tribune*. 7 April 2017. Available at: <https://goo.gl/XCfqx9>

¹¹ Interview with Aisha, women’s rights activist, 6 April 2016. Skype.

al-Islam to open up investigations into the case. The massacre magnified the powerlessness of the Libyan populace in the face of the regime's power. Until the regime admitted to its occurrence and released the names of those killed, families of Abu Slim prisoners would continue to visit the prison for many years, delivering food and other provisions to inmates without knowing if they were even alive.¹²

Through their use of excessive, seemingly unbridled force, authoritarian security services create a 'miasma of fear' that in turn becomes a 'powerful tool used by these organizations to bolster their authority' (Sassoon 2016: 114). Throughout Qadhafi's rule, the regime imprisoned, tortured and killed opposition writers and artists, and censored all dissenting intellectual thought (Diana 2014). As a result, Libyans speak of a crippling fear of Qadhafi's security apparatus prior to the Libyan uprising, rendering people unwilling to broach any vaguely political topic in public. Housam, who grew up in Tripoli, describes this as an exaggerated perception that the regime was listening in to every single conversation: 'I remember once chatting to a friend on the beach about something political, when he started to look right and left in a panic...I said to him, do you think the regime has a fish here with a spying device or something?!'¹³ The activist Fawzi noted that this fear was particularly associated with the physical strongholds of the Qadhafi regime: 'When you drive by Bab-Al-Aziziya [Qadhafi's compound] people wouldn't even talk in their cars, because they believed that French companies had set up magical radar systems that could hear what you were saying inside your car...they thought every single phone call was tapped'.¹⁴

The ability to engender and uphold a public perception of the ruler's omnipotence has been described as a characteristic of 'authoritarian cults' such as the

¹² Interview with Hussein, NTC representative, 7 November 2016. London.

¹³ Interview with Osama, reformist anti-regime demonstrator in Tripoli, 30 December 2015. Skype.

¹⁴ Interview with Fawzi. 29 December 2015. Skype.

cult of Syria's Hafiz Al-Asad (Wedeen 1999). Igor Cherstich (2014: 103) recounts conversations with Libyans in Tripoli in which they alleged that Qadhafi had dealings with dark powers, using sorcery to transcend the limits of the physical world and survive multiple assassination attempts. As argued by James Scott (1990: 49), 'if subordinates believe their superior to be powerful, the impression will help him impose himself and, in turn, contribute to his actual power. Appearances do matter'. One Libyan described the fear of Qadhafi's security services as ubiquitous but not unfounded: it stemmed from the perception that the revolutionary committees had infiltrated every segment of Libyan society through recruiting covert informants. As a result, there was a veiled understanding that 'the closest people to you' could be regime spies, including family members and friends.¹⁵ This perception even led to the circulation of a joke that Libya was the 'land of a million spies' (*shosheed*) in contrast to Algeria, the 'land of a million martyrs' (Al-Werfalli 2011: 148-149). This targeted involvement of a populace in a regime's policies of control, which was evident in Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria (Sassoon 2016: 149) creates popular 'complicity' in upholding a regime's mode of domination (Wedeen 1999). The Tripoli-based activist Osamad described this as a pervasive phenomenon during the rule of Qadhafi:

This type of slander destroyed the social fabric of Libya. Under Qadhafi, the worst accusation was being called 'a rat'. They'd say 'Look, it's a rat, catch him', even if you hadn't done anything suspicious. I remember an incident with a friend who was part of the Popular Guard. Because of a disagreement with another person, he was accused of being a 'rat'. A few days later and he was gone. If someone wrote a 'report' on you, that was the end.¹⁶

¹⁵ Interview with Aisha, women's rights activist, 6 April 2016. Skype.

¹⁶ Interview with Osama, reformist anti-regime demonstrator in Tripoli, 30 December 2015. Skype.

This fear and mistrust, not only of the regime, but of other Libyans in general, also persisted among Libyans in exile. The activist Mustafa argued that people did not want to be seen to harbour any dissenting thoughts: ‘even those Libyans who went abroad, where there was literature by the opposition out there, you can’t believe how frightened they were to even look at it. Most people just didn’t want to know’.¹⁷ Abdul Rahman and Ali, both of whom were raised in the UK, recall being warned to ‘keep away’ from Libyans and to refrain from broaching political topics, in order to avoid association either with dissidents or with the regime’s security services (*mukhabarat*).¹⁸

The multi-institutional politics literature has emphasised that the material and symbolic powers of an institution shape representational practices and ways of acting within a particular social sphere (Friedland and Alford 1991). In the case of the *Jamahiriya*, some of those interviewed indicated the political significance of habitual turns of phrase in the Libyan dialect, seeing them as directly generated by the *Jamahiriya*’s coercive mechanisms. One such phrase is the common expression ‘turn a blind eye’ (*deer el-howla*). To ‘turn a blind eye’ is to feign ignorance of a subject about which one is well informed. It can be used in any social setting, but under Qadhafi’s rule, it was deployed if one was questioned by a suspected member of the revolutionary committees. Salem described this as a covert ‘defence mechanism’ practiced by Libyans: by feigning ignorance in a way that appears unpractised, the speaker could avoid being entrapped into saying anything negative about Qadhafi or the *Jamahiriya*, particularly when discussing public affairs.¹⁹ Cultivating a non-committal mind-set, and presenting perpetually alterable opinions, enabled the

¹⁷ Interview with Mustafa, anti-regime dissident and human rights campaigner, 4 March 2015. London.

¹⁸ Interview with Yahya, activist and NTC coordinator, 29 November 2016. Skype; Interview with Ali, rebel coordinator and fighter in Tripoli, 9 February 2015. Skype.

¹⁹ Interview with Salem, former economic analyst and anti-regime demonstrator, 10 December 2016. Birmingham.

speaker to remain in a state of plausible deniability: an important skill in a context where one could potentially be surrounded by spies.²⁰

The counterpart to skillfully ‘turning a blind eye’ is to fool others by ‘a run’ (*jarya*): a fabricated story that successfully hoodwinks the listener. A *jarya* can occur in the most casual and everyday settings, which makes it particularly difficult to detect. To successfully ‘run with’ a listener involves a degree of rhetorical skill and confers one-upmanship, suggesting as it does the social savvy of the person doing the ‘running’.²¹ Tareq, who was raised in the UK, asserted that being deceived by a *jarya* could be an embarrassing social experience in Libya, and one that diaspora youth, unaccustomed to informal conversational dynamics in the country, would easily fall victim to.²² If ‘turning a blind eye’ in the *Jamahiriya* indicates the ability to remain undetected, ‘running’ signals the capacity to detect and outwit others. Taken together, both allude to a state of hyper-vigilance cultivated by the coercive mechanisms of authoritarian regimes, and signal the way in which an institution’s material practices can shape the performance of dualism and contradiction. According to the dissident Fayeze, the broader implication of such ingrained social practices is that ‘you don’t trust anybody. If anyone suggests something to you, you think about it twice. They might have a hidden motive for saying it’.²³

It is important to note the partial relaxation of the regime’s coercive strictures on political expression in the final decade of the *Jamahiriya*. Qadhafi’s son Saif al-Islam, as part of the regime’s effort to internationally rebrand itself, introduced a reformist rhetoric that saw the opening up of Libyan media and broadcasting (Richter 2013: 157). He oversaw the establishment of newspapers that ‘initiated a degree of

²⁰ Interview with Aisha, women’s rights activist, 6 April 2016. Skype.

²¹ Interview with Salem, former economic analyst and anti-regime demonstrator, 10 December 2016. Birmingham.

²² Interview with Tareq, social media activist and translator, 15 February 2015. Oxford.

²³ Interview with Fayeze, exiled anti-regime dissident, 27 January 2016. London.

public debate on political issues’, and ‘offered alternatives to the stultifying media run by the Libyan state or by the Revolutionary Committees Movement’ (Joffé 2013: 34). However, even in these newspapers, *Ouya* and *Quryna*, writers exercised extreme care not to mention Qadhafi or his inner circle, and to restrict their criticism to bureaucrats at most.²⁴ Moreover, there continued to be arrests, disappearances and murders of opposition writers (Diana 2014: 448). In particular, the persistence of the regime’s security sector was evident in the arrests of political activists in the months prior to the 2011 Libyan uprising (St. John 2014: 108).

5.3 Material Control in the *Jamahiriya*: Political and Public Institutions

The *Jamahiriya*’s coercive practices, outlined above, closely resemble those of other Arab autocracies. Their purpose was to ensure the stability of the regime through a combination of co-optation, repression and symbolic intimidation, even if the ‘revolutionary’ vehicles through which this coercion was exercised were distinctive in form. In contrast, the *Jamahiriya*’s system of political governance – the other component of its material technologies of control – was idiosyncratic in both form and purpose. Dismissing the party system as despotic, Qadhafi devised a novel system of political governance based on popular committees and congresses, which was perpetually fine-tuned in an appeal to popular mobilisation, and which purportedly comprised the ‘chief institutional embodiment of the sovereignty of Libyan individuals’ (Davis 1987: 20).

The political sphere in the *Jamahiriya* can be bifurcated into two parallel structures: ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ authority (Mattes 2008: 70-76). Formal authority,

²⁴ Interview with Osama, reformist anti-regime demonstrator in Tripoli, 30 December 2015. Skype.

or the *Jamahiriya*'s system of 'direct democracy', centered on Basic Popular Congresses (BPCs): bodies of universal membership that delegated power to Basic Popular Committees, who in turn formulated policies that would be subsequently enacted at the national level (Vandewalle 1998: 95). The General People's Congress (GPC), or the equivalent of a national parliament, was drawn from delegates of the BPCs. It met yearly and elected members of the General Popular Committee, which formulated policy in accordance with the GPC's principles: policy that was subsequently transmitted to the popular committees accountable to the BPCs. The channelling of decisions from the base to the top underpinned the *Jamahiriya*'s claim to establishing direct democracy, and set in the motion 'the bottom-up, top-down pattern of the circulation of power that was thoroughly unique to Libya' (Joffé 2013: 23). The counterpart to this system was informal authority, composed of Qadhafi, his inner circle, and the revolutionary committees, whose mandate was defined by Qadhafi himself.

As a political decision-making mechanism, formal power carried little authority in the *Jamahiriya*. The GPC was reorganised or 'reformed' whenever its delegates contravened Qadhafi's stipulations or made requests that were deemed inconsistent with the revolution, such as their calls for wage increases in the fourth session in December 1978, or their rejection of Qadhafi's liberalised divorce laws in February 1984 (St John 1987: 133). Foreign policy, the army, the country's budget, and the petroleum sector were all beyond its remit of discussion (Vandewalle 2006: 105). Although discussion on the provision of goods and services was permitted - in this respect resembling the nominal role of parliaments in countries such as Egypt (Sassoon 2016: 58-59) - the voices in that debate were not accorded equal status. As minister himself, Qadhafi could 'switch register at a moment's notice to remind his

fellow-participants that he had special knowledge of the state of affairs' (Davis 1987: 73). Televised proceedings of the GPC have been described as useful principally for monitoring the impromptu pronouncements that Qadhafi himself might make, and which would subsequently be ratified as official 'policy'.²⁵

The substantial gulf between the theoretical and practical authority of the congress system was further exacerbated by the informal, unregulated revolutionary sector. In 1978, Qadhafi gave revolutionary committees the power to 'monitor' – or in practice, to ultimately determine – the appointment of people to popular congresses: 'the people are the ones who formed popular congresses, and they are the ones who are now re-selecting their leaderships, and they are the ones who established revolutionary committees to supervise this work'.²⁶ In his speeches, he increasingly distinguished between those theoretically in power (the people) and those who were more entitled to wield it (the revolutionaries), developing a slogan in 1979 mandating that 'No one can be a revolutionary outside the revolutionary committees' (*la thawri karij al-lijan al-thawriyya*) (Vandewalle 1998: 101). The definition and arbitration of 'power and interest' (Friedland and Alford 1991: 250) in the *Jamahiriyah* was thus dependent on the extent of one's identification with and support of Qadhafi's revolution. Because this categorisation of power was accompanied by semi- unchecked political and coercive authority, it generated a common perception that the formal system was impotent in comparison with the revolutionary committees, and led to rapidly diminishing participation rates within a few years of the establishment of the *Jamahiriyah* (El-Fathaly and Palmer 1980: 346). As a result, it is often asserted that, through mechanisms of control such as the revolutionary committees, Qadhafi

²⁵ Interview with Hisham, pro-opposition medical doctor, 5 December 2016. Skype.

²⁶ Speech by Mu'ammarr al-Qadhafi, cited in Mohammed Magariaf, *The Crimes of Libya's Revolutionary Committees: Who is Responsible for Them?* 32.

ruled Libya with an iron fist, making all decisions and setting all policies despite playing no official role in its political institutions (Pargeter 2006; Joffe 2013; El-Khawas 2013).

The literature on Middle East authoritarianism has increasingly stressed the need to pay attention to political institutions under dictatorship (Stacher 2012). However, because of the imposing authority of the ‘informal’ revolutionary sector, this analysis has not been extended to the *Jamahiriya*’s political institutions. The *Jamahiriya* has been described as ‘weakly institutionalized’ in general (Brown 2016), its governance system incomparable with the nominally democratic legislatures and political parties in ‘hybrid’ authoritarian regimes, which serve as a practical, negotiating tool with elites and opponents (Brownlee 2007; Gandhi 2008). As a result, political institutions in the *Jamahiriya* have often been viewed as an extension of the *Jamahiriya*’s coercive mechanisms of control (Sassoon 2016), an indication of ‘sultanism’ (Chehabi and Linz 1998; Johnson 2015), or as simply redundant in practice (Vandewalle 1998).

Assertions of Libya’s institutional incapacity would appear to be validated by the *Jamahiriya*’s practical distinction between formal and informal authority. However, despite its idiosyncrasy, the governance system in the *Jamahiriya* still possessed a material purpose: it established the ‘rules of the game’ (Polletta 2004) through which political and organisational activity operated, and could be manipulated, within Libya. The sheer multiplicity of institutions worked to tightly structure the terms of political engagement, preventing the emergence of organised opposition while acting as a distributive mechanism to those who occupied them. They also possessed a symbolic function, curtailing the emergence of representational capacity inside the *Jamahiriya*, and delimiting accountability – and therefore agency

(Kockleman 2007: 387). Taking the *Jamahiriya*'s political system seriously within an institutional framework is crucial to grasping its material and symbolic import.

The *Jamahiriya*'s political system tightly delimited and weakened the 'systematic articulation of interests' in the country (Vandewalle 1998: 133), in part through its very internal composition. All of the *Jamahiriya*'s political institutions, with their extensive sub-structures and overlapping mandates, were purportedly responsible for the establishment of the popular policy agenda. In practice, this meant that no one institution was accountable: the national level bodies were not accountable because of their reliance on consensus from BPCs, and the BPCs were not accountable because they were popular bodies with universal membership.²⁷ Debates were rampant, but did not lead to tangible agendas or to implementation policies; issues could be discussed for years before they were resolved. This time-consuming and chaotic political system was designed to achieve little of practical impact, even in the most procedural areas of public policy, therefore creating an executive void that was occupied by Qadhafi and the revolutionary sector. This system has been extensively analysed and apolitically characterised by Adam Smith International as 'administrative decentralisation without authority',²⁸ but in reality, the Qadhafi regime generated authority through this systematic practice of disorganised, administrative decentralisation.

Qadhafi further weakened the systematic articulation of interests in Libya by tinkering with and continuing to expand these existent political institutions. In 1998, he created regional bodies known as *sha'abiyat*, located between the basic and national levels of government; in 2006, he altered the number of *sha'abiyat* from 32 to 20, and established the *kumon* structure: a sub-BPC body that selected leaders for

²⁷ Adam Smith International. 2007. "Document 5: Policy Development and Decision Making": 11.

²⁸ Ibid. "Document 1: Civil Servants and Political Officials": 8.

the BPCs and discussed the issues on which the BPCs took decisions.²⁹ The parameters of the political system were thus continuously being shifted, fine-tuned and modified, with frequent changes in the design of executive institutions. The scholarly literature on Libya has indicated that the abundance of committees, congresses and supervisory bodies, and the frequent institutional changes they underwent, served as a tool of political control, preventing the building up of organisational strength and ensuring the dependency of the system on Qadhafi (Vandewalle 1998, 2016; Pargeter 2006).

This analysis of the political system can be further expanded with reference to the proliferation of sub-committees within those institutions. One of the official slogans of the *Jamahiriyah*, first featured in *The Green Book*, was ‘committees are everywhere’ (*al-lijan fi kulli makan*). This slogan has been analysed in relation to the revolutionary committees (Mattes 1995), because Qadhafi himself directly applied this slogan to the revolutionary committees movement in a speech in 1978.³⁰ However, the profusion of committees was also a central component of the formal political sphere. Within the *Jamahiriyah*’s political institutions, any discussion of policy proposals would necessitate the establishment of temporary, ad hoc committees (*lijan*) comprised of public servants, experts and various secretaries.³¹ These committees were tasked with developing draft proposals and solutions to identified problems. However, their emergent proposals – which were worked on in isolation – would never constitute actual policy papers; indeed, they were never even archived.

²⁹ Adam Smith International. 2007. “Document 5: Policy Development and Decision Making”: 10.

³⁰ Speech by Mu’ammār al-Qadhafi, cited in Mohammed Magariaf, *The Crimes of Libya’s Revolutionary Committees: Who is Responsible for Them?* 31.

³¹ Adam Smith International. 2007. “Document 5: Policy Development and Decision Making”: 49.

The consequence was that another committee would have to be formed when a similar agenda item was subsequently raised in future.³²

To a certain degree, the committee system can be construed as further evidence of Libya's 'weakly institutionalised' character under Qadhafi. Salem, a former economic analyst within the Libyan NEDB, argued that the process of committee-formation eroded institutional memory in Libya: 'There was no transfer of knowledge. Anyone who wanted to do something had to start from scratch'.³³ In this vein, the 2007 Adam Smith International project scrutinised the political system in Libya using a merit-based civil service framework, and made recommendations based on institutional reform and the creation of strong instruments of policymaking.³⁴ However, the *Jamahiriya*'s political system takes on an added significance if we begin from the premise that institutions are a material and symbolic ordering of reality, and that political agency rests on the ability to reclassify and reconstitute this institutional domain (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008: 84). The *Jamahiriya*'s political system permitted scope for the debate and discussion of policy proposals, but it prevented that process from shaping the material realities of everyday life in the *Jamahiriya*; in other words, it inhibited the emergence of political agency by stripping discourse of its constitutive and classificatory capacity.

The *Jamahiriya*'s political system further curtailed political agency by being couched in Qadhafi's ideological principle of societal self-supervision: the notion that 'the people are themselves the instrument of government' (al-Qadhafi 1980: 33). Citing his absence from the *Jamahiriya*'s formal political structures, Qadhafi repeatedly denied his role in any decision-making process, and ascribed authority to

³² Adam Smith International. 2007. "Document 5: Policy Development and Decision Making": 48.

³³ Interview with Salem, former economic analyst and anti-regime demonstrator, 10 December 2016. Birmingham.

³⁴ Adam Smith International. 2007. "Document 1: Civil Servants and Political Officials": 11.

Libyans for being ‘responsible for everything...they are the ones who monitor and supervise, they are the ones who come up with solutions, solve problems, do everything’.³⁵ As the embodiment of this ideological precept, the committee system enabled Qadhafi to present himself as a voice of wisdom and calm within a chaotic system that he himself had orchestrated (Pargeter 2006: 225). Thus, while lacking in constitutive authority, Libyans were bestowed with political accountability.

In some respect, Qadhafi’s rhetoric arguably echoes authoritarian ‘vocabularies of complicity’ (Wedeen 1999: 6). Such vocabularies emerge as a result of authoritarian practices that construct citizens as ‘accomplices’ who uphold the norms constitutive of domination (ibid). As indicated above, complicity was engendered through the co-optation of the public into the regime’s security apparatus, but for authoritarian regimes, vocabularies of complicity are also a valuable representational resource, enabling the regime to free itself from accountability for its actions (Makiya 1993: 72). There is a parallel here with the *Jamahiriyah*: in this instance, an ideologically accountable citizenry could be rendered responsible for the institutionalised inadequacies of political governance. However, Qadhafi went beyond ‘complicity’ and ascribed sole accountability to the Libyan populace for the material realities of life in the *Jamahiriyah*. For instance, he argued that the Cultural Revolution which he had called for, encouraged and rewarded in the 1970s, and which led to ‘tyrannous’ behaviours under the mantra of ideological purification, from the expulsion of teachers to the takeover of private businesses, was ultimately the responsibility of the Libyan people: his own role was a corrective one, consisting only of ‘patching up this chaos’.³⁶

³⁵ Speech by Mu’ammarr al-Qadhafi, cited in Mohammed Magariaf, *The Crimes of Libya’s Revolutionary Committees: Who is Responsible for Them?* 33.

³⁶ “Qadhafi admits to destroying Libya”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/9PBqqe>

As part of Libya's drive towards economic liberalisation, Qadhafi's son, Saif al-Islam, increasingly spoke of Libya's institutional deficiencies, ascribing them to the 'absence of a constitution' at an event by the Qadhafi International Development Foundation in 2006:

Now, we have to admit that Libya, in the absence of a constitution, in the absence of a constitutional framework, and in the absence of constitutional laws, doesn't have stable and recognised institutions. Nor are the relationships between these institutions governed by law and protected by a constitution. We don't know how many regional organisations we need. We don't know if we should go to a *shaabiya* committee secretary or to its conference secretary. We don't know whether we should have five secretariats or ten secretariats, or whether the headquarters should be in Sirte or in Tripoli.³⁷

Despite Saif al-Islam's attempt to redirect accountability towards the regime, Qadhafi himself continued to argue that it was Libyans, particularly those in managerial positions, who were responsible for disorder in Libya. In September 2008, he asserted that government ministries were 'centres of mismanagement, graft and corruption', and suggested that their funds should be distributed directly to the people (St. John 2015: 92). In turn, he criticised Libyans for their own dependence on oil revenues and urged them to start manufacturing their required goods, 'seemingly oblivious to what his own policies – or lack thereof – had meant for the productive capacities of Libya in all economic sectors' (Vandewalle 2012b: 203). The *Jamahiriya*'s ideology of direct democracy, and the implementation of this ideology in a convoluted but powerless system of committees, congresses and sub-committees, thus constituted a

³⁷ "Saif al-Islam admits to chaos in Libya". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/p4tNzv>

contradictory ‘logic of practice’ that diminished political agency and situated Qadhafi as a vital but unaccountable political actor within it.

In addition to operating according to an ideology of ‘direct democracy’, the system of governance could also be interpreted as an extension of the way in which public institutions in general functioned inside Libya. The seemingly ineffectual design of Libya’s public institutions was arguably enabled by, and reinforced, a system of ‘rentierism’. ‘Rentier states’ have been described as those in which income is generated from a non-productive economy, such as oil revenues, (Lecha and Zaccara 2013), and where the ‘primary internal economic function is to divide among their citizens revenues that accrue directly as rent’ (Vandewalle 1998: 21). Thus, it has been argued that, in an effort to sustain its authoritarian rule, the *Jamahiriya* transformed state institutions, ‘political’ and otherwise, into ‘intricate channels for economic largesse’ (Vandewalle 2012b: 189-190).

Rentier State Theory (RST) has served as a prominent interpretive framework for understanding the longevity of authoritarian rule in Libya (Anderson 1986; Vandewalle 1998; Sandbakken 2006; Schwarz 2008; Brynen et al 2012). It can also consolidate an understanding of the *Jamahiriya*’s material technologies of control. The *Jamahiriya* harnessed the distributive potential of disorderly institutionalisation by mandating the establishment and disbursement of countless policymaking committees. As noted earlier, such committees attained very little in terms of tangible policy-making, or even knowledge transmission. However, the formation of committees has been described as a method of channelling resources to the populace, who in turn could redeploy committees as a mechanism of patronage: ‘committees

gave everyone a small fiefdom where they could place their own allies and people'.³⁸

Although Qadhafi verbally admonished Libyans for being responsible for the *Jamahiriya*'s failings, political institutions had no regularity capacity in practice; there was little oversight or accountability for the way in which public services were operated or mismanaged.³⁹ The 'rules of the game' permitted a great deal of financial latitude to those who operated within the *Jamahiriya*'s formal political sphere, so long as its central contradiction – its claim to being a 'direct democracy' with Qadhafi as Leader of the Revolution – was upheld.

The operation of policymaking committees as a distributive channel can also be understood within the broader context of the *Jamahiriya*'s management of the public sector. For instance, it is commonly noted that public sector employment in the *Jamahiriya* comprised almost 80% of the working population (Herb 2014: 189); of this figure, 16% were employed in political institutions, compared to an average of 6.3% in the Arab world.⁴⁰ Sectors such as Education had budgets that were characterised as a 'surrogate employment programmes', with double the amount of required teachers on the payroll.⁴¹ Within every institution, there was a 'General Department for Administrative and Financial Affairs', which contained an 'Inbox' (*al-waarid*) and an 'Outbox' (*al-saadir*) functions: jobs involving the recording and transferral of all inbound and outbound correspondence. Thus, the Libyan public system did not use email, instead assigning employees exclusively to these roles.⁴²

³⁸ Interview with Salem, former economic analyst and anti-regime demonstrator, 10 December 2016. Birmingham.

³⁹ Adam Smith International. 2007. "Document 4: Executive Structures at Local and Regional Level": 61.

⁴⁰ Ibid. "Document 2: Reducing Rigidities in Civil Service Staffing": 1.

⁴¹ Ibid. "Document 3: Libyan Public Sector Administration: Development Programme": 20.

⁴² Interview with Salem, former economic analyst and anti-regime demonstrator, 10 December 2016. Birmingham.

This practice has been described as the ‘use of bureaucratic employment as a patronage resource’: another characteristic of rentierist economies (Hertog 2010: 5).

The introduction of the ‘appointment’ (*‘ta’yeen*) system in 1982, which has been described as a ‘form of rentier entitlements paid as wages’, further systemised the *Jamahiriyah*’s distributive policies.⁴³ *Ta’yeen* involved the permanent appointment of employees into public sector jobs, from which they could no longer be dislodged, only reshuffled. It nullified the need for job descriptions, qualifications or skills as the basis for employment. As one Libyan explained, *tay’een* was a safe form of job security that guaranteed a steady ‘living’ (*‘m’aash’*) however inadequate the salary actually was.⁴⁴ Indeed, it was possible, after being appointed, to ‘play the system’ by collecting multiple paycheques for assorted public sectors jobs that one could get away with performing part-time.⁴⁵ This need for manoeuvre and extraction within the public sector emerged as a result of Qadhafi’s complete abolition of private commerce in 1981 (Pargeter 2012: 109).

The explanatory scope of RST is ambitious, with its proponents arguing that distributive policies sever the taxation/representation linkage necessary for political mobilisation, thereby accounting for a depoliticised populace (Vandewalle 1998). However, it must be applied with circumspection to Libya (Pargeter 2016: 184), particularly within an institutional interpretation of the *Jamahiriyah*. The flow of local social benefits and the provision of social welfare – which is a central characteristic of distributive states (Vandewalle 1998: 132; Davidson 2012: 49-50) - was compromised due to the lack of transparency over the delivery of public goods, and the lack of assigned responsibility for particular services to any government units.

⁴³ Interview with Salem, former economic analyst and anti-regime demonstrator, 10 December 2016. Birmingham.

⁴⁴ Interview with Aisha, women’s rights activist, 6 April 2016. Skype.

⁴⁵ Interview with Hisham, pro-opposition medical doctor, 5 December 2016. Skype.

This often led to a duplication or under-provision of public services.⁴⁶ Thus, ‘mechanisms of internal redistribution’ (Lecha and Zaccara 2013: 163) were weak in the *Jamahiriyah*, embedded within a formal system of governance that undermined the organisational capacities of those within it. Moreover, these mechanisms were also offset by the Qadhafi regime’s costly personal expenditures and economic policies, such as the war in Chad (1980-87), bribes to African leaders, and ambitious, inefficient agricultural projects (Sassoon 2016: 183), in contrast to austere ‘revolutionary policies’ that saw the freezing of government employees’ salaries for decades (Vandewalle 2008: 228).

There also remains a need for nuance when interpreting RST’s understanding of the social dynamics engineered by distributive practices. It is often argued that rentierism in Libya generated a ‘culture of entitlement’ (St. John 2013: 95) and ‘kept citizens voiceless’ (Vandewalle 2012b: 190) by inhibiting their inclinations and capacities for political mobilisation. Despite this argument, a key tenet of multi-institutional theory is that even the most fixed institutional routines are capable of being interpreted and re-performed in a multitude of ways (Sewell 1992: 19). In this view, the extraction of resources in pursuit of material interests arguably blurs the line between compliance with an institution’s logic of practice, while asserting agency in relation to it. Thus, the practice of ‘coping’ with the *Jamahiriyah*’s political system (Vandewalle 2006: 129), and with widespread material and economic hardship (Joffé 2016: 122) entailed practising survivalist strategies. For instance, increasingly, and following a degree of economic liberalisation in the 2000s, it was seen as commonplace for doctors to misuse public resources for private gain, in light of the

⁴⁶ Adam Smith International. 2007. “Document 4: Executive Structures at Local and Regional Level”: 61.

inadequacy of the state salary.⁴⁷ The dialectical term *affari* (from the Italian word for ‘business’) was commonly used by Libyans to refer to the kind of informal, crafty and often short-lived economic ventures that people would engage in to supplement their incomes.⁴⁸

Conversely, the process of ‘coping’ with a material system can be seen to further embed individuals within an institution’s logic of practice. This possible interpretation is missing from Joseph Sassoon’s description of administrative and bureaucratic corruption in the Arab republics, which, he argues, was fundamentally undertaken by ‘economic elites’ (2016: 177-183). According to one activist and later coordinator of the Libyan Prime Minister’s Office in 2011, abiding by the ‘rules of the games’ was built into the very act of co-existing with the *Jamahiriya*: ‘as soon as you accept the salary of the state, you are accepting the status quo’.⁴⁹ However, he went to question the moral culpability of this, adding that ‘people had to accept it, otherwise they would starve’.⁵⁰ The dissident Fayeze has in turn contended that the political system in Libya ultimately worked to create an atmosphere of distrust. ‘Qadhafi taught people to hate each other’: not simply by instilling an atmosphere of fear, but by institutionalising a suspicion of others’ material motives.⁵¹ Such zero-sum understandings point us again towards Lisa Wedeen’s (1999: 6) concept of ‘complicity’ as a formidable authoritarian strategy. Although these interpretations do not fully capture the agentive ambiguities of survivalist activities, what they do affirm is the notion that an institution’s material practices can constitute the social world by defining and sanctioning set rituals and patterns of behaviour.

⁴⁷ Interview with Hisham, pro-opposition medical doctor, 5 December 2016. Skype.

⁴⁸ Interview with Aisha, women’s rights activist, 6 April 2015. Skype.

⁴⁹ Interview with Yahya, activist and NTC coordinator, 29 November 2016. Skype.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Interview with Fayeze, exiled anti-regime dissident, 27 January 2016. London.

The above discussion has sought to supplement the analysis of the *Jamahiriya*'s coercive apparatus by focusing on its system of political governance. Through its 'formal' political system, the *Jamahiriya* functioned in a 'supraorganizational' way (Friedland and Alford 1991: 243), creating institutionalised disorder under the mantra of 'committees everywhere', and positioning this as a distributive mechanism through which people could reproduce their material subsistence, and as a justification for the interventions of 'informal' revolutionary authority. This bifurcation of formal and informal authority ultimately hinged on contradiction: while stripping discourse of its constitutive and representational function, Qadhafi continued to assert that the *Jamahiriya* was a 'direct democracy' and that Libyans themselves were accountable for the *Jamahiriya*'s limitations. Libyans were ambiguously positioned in relation to this system. They were established within its material practices, but also manoeuvred in and around them in furtherance of their own interests.

5.4 The Symbolic Organisation of the *Jamahiriya*

Material technologies of domination constitute one element of an institution's logic of practice. Dominant symbolic representations also impose meanings onto reality and contain mechanisms for ensuring their dissemination and re-performance within a particular social sphere. In this vein, the *Jamahiriya*'s system of symbolic organisation is a crucial complement to its material authority, comprising 'a powerful combination of ideology, charisma, reliance on moral suasion and religious symbols, and invented national myths' (Vandewalle 1998: 29). The symbolism of the *Jamahiriya* cluttered the public sphere and was unified around Qadhafi's own

identity, representing him as the personification of Libyan nationhood, and defining national citizenship as allegiance to Qadhafi's revolution.

The *Jamahiriya*'s system of symbolic organisation was initially premised on the propagation of Nasserite pan-Arabism and a defiant anti-colonial rhetoric. In his speech on 1 September 1969, Qadhafi declared colonialist forces to be 'the enemy of the Arab *ummah* and the enemy of Islam' (St. John 1987: 27), following up the pronouncement with a series of religious and nationalistic policies that were framed as a rejection of Western imperialism. This included the termination of the military-base agreements with the United States and Britain and the expulsion of twenty thousand Italian residents from Libya (El-Kikhia 1998: 40). Other 'acts of national independence' instated by Qadhafi signalled a dedication to Islam, such as the mandatory translation of signs, tickets and passports into Arabic, the banning of alcohol consumption, and the closure of nightclubs (Vandewalle 2006: 87). Such acts have been described as 'largely symbolic' gestures that were nevertheless popular due to their rejection of foreign values and promotion of Arab unity (St. John 1987: 27).

As argued by Scott (1990: 47), the ability to crowd out alternative actions from the public stage is a characteristic of dominant political and symbolic practices. Qadhafi claimed to further his commitment to the Arabization of the Libyan polity by marginalising the Amazigh, or Berbers of Libya. He banned the use of the Tamazight language in public and prohibited the display of the Amazigh flag (Schnelzer 2016: 50), justifying these policies by arguing that the encouragement of minority practices would sow further division in Libya, which he described as a 'homogenous Muslim Arabic society in culture, language and belief' (Joffé 2013: 38). Under the banner of anti-colonialism, Qadhafi also rejected the Sanusiyya or Sanusi Order, a revivalist Islamic movement established in the eastern Libyan region of Cyrenaica, and that had

ultimately led to the political ascendancy of King Idris al-Sanusi, the heir to the Sanusiyya Order (Vandewalle 2006: 31). The Sanusiyya possessed a prominent Islamic, Sufi ethos, embodied in and disseminated through religious lodges (*'zuwaya'*), and had even developed a basic structure of governance that supplied social services through tax collection (Vandewalle 2006: 19). Moreover, the Sanusi Order had been the focal point of Cyrenaican resistance to the Italian invasion of Libya, famously led by the tribal leader Omar al-Mukhtar from 1928 until his capture and execution in 1931.

With its own narratives of anti-colonial struggle, the Sanusiyya was sufficiently threatening and influential to be both rejected and appropriated by turns. Qadhafi denigrated the monarchy's long association with the British, including its dependence on income from British and American air bases, and contrasted its lip service towards Libyan-Arab brotherhood with its quiescence towards the events of the Middle East (Davis 1987: 33). In 1984, Qadhafi ordered the destruction of the tomb of Sayyid Muhammad ibn Ali al-Sanussi, the founder of the Sanussi Order (Benotman, Pack and Brandon 2013: 194). By delegitimising the Sanusiyya, Qadhafi was able to present himself as the heir of Omar al-Mukhtar's legacy, asserting that the 1969 revolution was the fulfilment of a decades-long struggle against Italian colonialism (St. John 1987: 28). The legacy of Omar al-Mukhtar was celebrated in street names and currency notes, and symbolically alluded to in Qadhafi's first public speech in 1969, which was delivered next to Mukhtar's tomb in Benghazi (McGregor 2011). Qadhafi's attempts to firmly associate himself with Omar al-Mukhtar would continue unabated: a photograph of a chained and captured Mukhtar was attached to the lapel of his military uniform during his visit to Italy in 2009 (BBC 2009). The *Jamahiriyah's* valorisation of Omar al-Mukhtar absorbed his anti-colonial credentials while

discounting his association with the Sanusiyya. Qadhafi's appropriation of Mukhtar thus functioned in a similar manner to the nationalist narratives perpetuated by President Hafiz al-Asad's regime, blending 'consensual understandings with obviously false statements' (Wedeen 1999: 7). In this way, the *Jamahiriya* could be packaged as both the fulfilment of a nation's historical aspirations, and as an original, founding movement.

The initial symbolic configuration proposed by Qadhafi was not particularly contentious, premised as it was on the re-articulation of the Nasserite values that had underpinned the rhetoric of the 1969 Free Officers movement. It has also been noted that Qadhafi's nominal instatement of Islamic legislation and sharia principles in Libya in 1971 was popularly well-received, and presented as further indication of the regime's anti-Western orientation (St John 1987: 31). However, and with the establishment of the *Jamahiriya*, Qadhafi was to construct an alternative Islamic framework based on his own interpretive religious jurisdiction. Thus, he increasingly rejected the orthodox sources of theological authority, such as the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence, arguing that they were the product of political struggles; in their stead, he declared the Qu'ran to be the sole source of Islamic justice (St John 1987: 32). In place of the sayings of the Islamic prophet Muhammad (*hadith*) and religious commentaries and exegetical texts (*tafseer*), Qadhafi was to describe *The Green Book* as 'the gospel of the new era, the era of the masses' (Takeyh 2003: 156).

By marginalising the arbitrating power of scholars, and imposing himself as the principal mediator of Qur'anic doctrine, Qadhafi established a separate interpretive monopoly over Islam that translated into a practical refashioning of the religious landscape in Libya. In 1977, he altered the calendar to count the Muslim era from Muhammad's death; the following year, mosques were 'purified' as a way of

silencing prominent religious figures and expropriating religious endowments (Davis 1987: 57). Qadhafi continued to contravene the religious establishment, propagating a separate system for moon sightings during Islamic festivals that would often see Libyans celebrating on different days to the rest of the Arab world, thereby ensuring that Libyans themselves upheld Qadhafi's violation of religious orthodoxy.⁵² This flurry of theological innovations would earn Qadhafi condemnation from religious leaders such as the Egyptian preacher Abdel-Hamid Kishk, who satirised him as the 'Prophet of the Desert, Owner of the Green Book', and claimed that his flawed Qur'anic recitations were evidence of his malicious intent to destroy the orthodoxies of the faith.⁵³ In turn, Qadhafi imposed a ban on Kishk's sermons, which were widely distributed in cassette tapes throughout the Arab world.⁵⁴

The ideological foundations of the *Jamahiriyah* thus rested on a combination of pan-Arab nationalism, anti-imperialism and Islamic legitimacy, embodied in the adoption of a green flag – a colour long associated with Islam – and the anti-colonial national anthem 'Allahu Akbar' in 1977. Such symbols would come to literally dominate the physical landscape of Libya, when Qadhafi mandated that the metal shutters of all shop fronts be painted green (Jawad 2012). However, this ideological formulation soon coalesced into a specific panegyric vocabulary, centred principally on Qadhafi himself as the embodiment of the *Jamahiriyah's* revolutionary spirit. In this vein, it has been argued that it is customary in authoritarian regimes to see a gradual blurring of ideology and personality cult, the former gradually being replaced by the latter in cases such as Iraq and Syria (Sasoon 2016: 49). People in Tripoli 'lived in a space saturated with the symbolic and visual presence of Qadhafi' (Cherstich 2014:

⁵² Interview with Hisham, pro-opposition medical doctor, 5 December 2016. Skype.

⁵³ "Qadhafi mocks Islam". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/pdmkFh>

⁵⁴ Interview with Aisha, women's rights activist, 6 April 2016. Skype.

102). Posters and pictures of Qadhafi were abundant, found in public offices, schools, and hospitals, and in the main intersection point in the capital, the Green Square. In such images, Qadhafi was depicted as superhuman, even divine, and fashioned as the disembodied symbol of the Libyan state (Khatib 2013b: 185). Images of Qadhafi were often accompanied, in writing, by the brief, utopian slogans which had become part of the *Jamahiriya*'s rhetorical formulae: 'With you we will embrace glory' (*'ma'aka nuanik ul-majd'*), 'Al-Fateh: the dawn of freedom' (*al-fateh fajr al-hurriyah*'), 'All loyalty is to you, leader of the revolution' (*'kul al-wafaa' laka ya qaid al-thuwra*').

The visual symbolism surrounding Qadhafi shifted regularly: he was illustrated as a revolutionary warrior in 1970s, an authentically Bedouin figure during the 1980s, and a sub-Saharan African 'King of Kings' in the 2000s (Cherstich 2014: 99-100). These changes reflected Qadhafi's own fluctuating political and ideological leanings, particularly the redirection of his foreign policy efforts from the Arab world to Africa. What remained consistent was the imposition of this imagery onto public space. The yearly celebrations of the 1969 coup were a lavish public spectacle that was broadcast on Libyan television, and that would see the showcasing of new billboards, designed by foreign PR agencies, centring on the figure of Qadhafi (Noueihed and Warren 2012: 1). Such occasions ultimately marked a dissonance between the regime's self-presentation and the social reality of the everyday: in Tripoli, the yearly anniversaries were defined by zealous clean-up campaigns and public works initiatives that would often be abandoned as soon as the event came to a close.⁵⁵

The *Jamahiriya*'s symbolism also came to dominate cultural terrains such as education. Again, this partly involved a process of visual affirmation: Qadhafi's shifting self-representation was imposed onto school uniforms, which variously

⁵⁵ Interview with Aisha, women's rights activist, 6 April 2016. Skype.

required the donning of traditional Libyan dress in the 1970s and the wearing of military uniforms thereafter.⁵⁶ In turn, revolutionary committees transformed schools and universities, and even children's theatres and arts halls, into military barracks.⁵⁷ However, symbolic dominance was also pursued through the public affirmation of the *Jamahiriya*'s ideology, from a young age. Schools mandated the study and examination of *The Green Book* and its philosophy, in a subject titled 'The Community of the Masses' (*al-mujtama al-jamahiri*). As argued by dissident Mustafa, schools were presented as rife with 'political education' (*al-taleem al-siyasi*), but this focused purely on the discussion, replication and re-performance of the slogans and ideas put forward by Qadhafi.⁵⁸ Libyan universities were devoid of academic resources on human rights and political pluralism, even within the faculties of Political Science and Law.⁵⁹

Dominant institutional meanings have been understood as powerful principally for their capacity to be rendered 'invisible', commonplace and accepted within a social sphere (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008: 83). Libyan activists have argued that, to some extent, the populace absorbed Qadhafi's refashioning of Libya's historical, ideological and political landscape in the 1980s. According to the opposition figure Hussein, Qadhafi's approach to education comprised a form of 'social and cultural conditioning', which 'had its largest influence on the younger generation...there were youngsters who genuinely thought that the "Independence" of Libya came with Qadhafi in 1969'.⁶⁰ The opposition figure Fayez concurs, asserting that adults had some understanding of political pluralism, and of the reality of 'Libya' before 1969,

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ El-Feitouri, Ahmed. "The people demand the fall of the regime" (*al-sha'b yureed isqat al-nitham*). *Mayadeen*. 22 May 2011. Issue 3: 2.

⁵⁸ Interview with Mustafa, anti-regime dissident and human rights campaigner, 4 March 2015. London.

⁵⁹ al-Deghali, Salwa. "When the bloodshed began, we called for an end to the regime" (*heyana sal al-dam asbaha al-matlab isqat al-nitham*). *Mayadeen*. 1 May 2011. Issue 1: 16.

⁶⁰ Interview with Hussein, NTC representative, 7 November 2016. London.

but that those who grew up in the 1980s ‘knew nothing of the world except what Qadhafi told them’.⁶¹ This claim that the younger generation of Libyans were entirely indoctrinated into the *Jamahiriya*’s ideology is contested by the activist Osama, who argues that many could see past its self-aggrandising rhetoric, even if they weren’t ‘politically educated’.⁶² According to Aisha, what remained the case, however, was the absence of a palpable reference point as to what life in Libya was like prior to the Qadhafi regime:

My generation could remember how things were before Qadhafi. The mail would be delivered to our house every single day, on time. The litter was collected not once, but twice a day. At that time, our schoolteachers were Egyptians and Syrians, and they were excellent. The education system was still respectable until the early 1980s, before it was taken over by cheating and corruption.⁶³

In this view, even if the *Jamahiriya*’s symbolism wasn’t believed in by the younger generation, it still couldn’t be contextualised or compared to an alternative ordering of reality in Libya.

The *Jamahiriya*’s symbolism was further entrenched in the ideological appropriation of musical art forms, such that, according to Libyan journalist Ahmed El-Feitouri, the role of culture was turned into ‘something resembling military propaganda’.⁶⁴ Joseph Sassoon (2016: 204) has argued that, within authoritarian regimes, the creative arts play a key role in ‘expressing the systematic adulation of the leaders and presenting their heroic deeds and wise policies’, both to the populace and

⁶¹ Interview with Fayez, exiled anti-regime dissident, 27 January 2016. London.

⁶² Interview with Osama, reformist anti-regime demonstrator in Tripoli, 30 December 2015. Skype.

⁶³ Interview with Aisha, women’s rights activist, 6 April 2015. Skype.

⁶⁴ El-Feitouri, Ahmed. “The people demand the fall of the regime”. *Mayadeen*. 22 May 2011. Issue 3: 2.

to the outside world. The 1969 coup was represented, from the outset, as the expression of popular political will. Songs such as ‘Oh First of September’ (*Ya aw’wal September*) and ‘Celebrations’ (*Afrah*) praise the ‘dawn of the Revolution’, with the latter valorising its populist spirit: ‘It revolted against sick hearts, and is the prosperity of the worker and the farmer’.⁶⁵

Increasingly – and again signifying the identification of the *Jamahiriyah* with Qadhafi - regime-commissioned music would focus on the proclaimed domestic and foreign achievements of Qadhafi himself, such as the construction of the US\$20 billion irrigation project The Great Man-Made River in 1983, hailed by Qadhafi as ‘the Eighth Wonder of the World’. In the music video for ‘He Brought the River’ (*Jaab al-nahr*), images of the construction project are accompanied by traditional Libyan *zokra* (bagpipes) and religious praise: ‘From the depths of the desert, he brought it to our homes; if not for him, we would never have lived this blessed moment’.⁶⁶ Other songs valorise Qadhafi’s accomplishments without offering a tangible material referent. ‘Beloved by Millions’ (*Habib al-malayeen*) praises Qadhafi for ‘sowing prosperity and goodness’ in the abstract.⁶⁷ ‘O’ Leader of Our Revolution’ (*Ya qaid thawrenta*) - one of the most famous *Jamahiriyah* anthems – lauds the *Jamahiriyah*’s notional claim to have cultivated direct democracy: ‘We are living in freedom, ruled by popular authority’.⁶⁸

The concept of ‘clutter’ is used by Wedeen (1999: 6) to describe the way in which authoritarian cults deploy the arts as a way of imposing monotonous slogans and empty gestures onto public space, thereby serving to ‘tire the minds and bodies of producers and consumers alike’. Libyan music ushered in an extensive, affective

⁶⁵ “O’ First of September”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/sh3WUw> ; “Celebrations”, YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/v8oboc>

⁶⁶ “He Brought the River”, YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/SZNidb>

⁶⁷ “Beloved by Millions”, YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/Hbck66>

⁶⁸ “O’ Leader of Our Revolution”, YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/nzeRiQ>

vocabulary surrounding Qadhafi that was re-performed and chanted on public occasions: ‘beloved by revolutionaries’, ‘our leader’, ‘our protector’, ‘the eagle’, ‘the knight’, and so on. The *Jamahiriya*’s ideas, signs and images, were, according to the Libyan academic Nizar Krekish, simply inescapable, and led to demoralising cultural stagnation: ‘even Libyan singing took on one rhythm, one structure, one tenor’.⁶⁹ The singer Mohammed Najem’s monarchical-era anthem, ‘Libya, a Melody in My Heart’ (*Libya, ya naghman fi khatri*) was prohibited by the regime: not because it explicitly mentioned the monarchy, but because it celebrated ‘Libya’, and not Qadhafi’s ‘*Jamahiriya*’.⁷⁰ Najem goes on to argue that Qadhafi replaced inclusive, nationalistic anthems, such as his own, with songs exclusively devoted to ‘glorifying the illusionary success’ of the Qadhafi regime; in the process, he undermined creativity and established ‘phony, fearful rituals’ in the sphere of the arts.

Moreover, and as noted by Wedeen, authoritarian regimes can prolong the longevity of their spectacles and images by repeatedly representing them on television over many years (1999: 24). In the official state television channel, *Al-Jamahiriya TV*, panegyric music was a regular part of its broadcasting schedule, customarily plugging in any gaps between other programmes.⁷¹ It has been argued that ‘the songs were played day and night on official Libyan television and radio...and there was no way to escape from this media of “the *Jamahiriya*’s heaven on earth” except by snatching glances at the television channels of other neighbouring countries’.⁷²

Above all, and in line with an institutional interpretation of the *Jamahiriya*, this iconography can be seen as powerful principally for its capacity to shape the symbolic

⁶⁹ Agela, Awad. “There is a difference” (*tham’ mata farq*). *Al-Manarah*, 29 July 2011. Issue 6: 8.

⁷⁰ Najem, Mohammed. “Even the air is different...and nature also” (*hatta al-hawa mukhtalif...waltabe’aa aydan*). *Mayadeen*. 1 May 2011. Issue 1: 18.

⁷¹ Interview with Tareq, social media activist and translator, 14 February 2015. Oxford

⁷² Burawi, Intissar. “The nationalistic song...a missing melody” (*al-nasheed al-watani...naghman mukhtafee*). *Mayadeen*, 2 August 2011. Issue 12: 8.

landscape of social life, and for its ability to concretise that system of meaning by mandating its ritualistic, public re-performance across multiple cultural spheres. Indeed, the very act of public speaking on state television necessitated the performance of obedience: greetings and praise for the ‘Brother Leader’, and the offering of good wishes for whichever festive occasion that was occurring at the time. Guests appearing on television programmes were careful to say ‘the *Jamahiriyah*’ as often as possible, instead of ‘Libya’.⁷³ More formally, and from the 1990s, tribes, communities and organisations increasingly proffered ‘loyalty contracts’ (*wathiqat ‘ahd wa muba’ya*) towards Qadhafi. Such oaths were underpinned by Islamic rhetoric, and have been interpreted as signalling a strong, public endorsement of Qadhafi’s rule (Sadiki 2014: 20). In reality, it has been argued by the Tripoli-based activist Reem that such oaths of allegiance were understood to be a transactional mechanism for gaining support from the regime, and were undertaken by a host of community organisations in need of financial backing.⁷⁴

As with oaths to Hafiz al-Asad, such proclamations rivalled the regime’s own panegyrics by ‘upping the rhetorical ante’ with increasingly ‘outlandish’ statements of loyalty (Wedeen 1999: 34-35). An oath of allegiance by ‘The International Association of Qadhafi Supporters’, hosted by the Libyan Medical University in Benghazi in April 2010, declared Qadhafi to be ‘the bearer of green hope and green thought...ushering forth a society of eternal happiness above the earth and under the sun’.⁷⁵ The rhetoric is indiscriminate, deploying assorted formulae, images and symbols in an interchangeable and incongruous manner. As with the music of the *Jamahiriyah*, the sentiment is a utopian one, and is not supported by references to

⁷³ Interview with Osama, reformist anti-regime demonstrator in Tripoli, 30 December 2015. Skype.

⁷⁴ Interview with Reem, women’s rights activist in Tripoli, 15 March 2015. Skype.

⁷⁵ “A declaration of loyalty to the brother leader of the revolution”. Libya Watanona, Available at: <https://goo.gl/G5ryBV>

tangible material practices. The significance here is not in its content, but in the act of its performance. As argued by Scott (1990: 4) the act of compliance within the public domain demonstrates and reinforces the existence of power relations, even if it does not arise from willing consent.

There are undoubtedly commonalities between the *Jamahiriya*'s iconography and that of other Arab authoritarian regimes. For instance, Qadhafi repeatedly equated his political mission with the popular will of the Libyan people. In this, he arguably mirrored the personality cult of Saddam Hussein, which presented Saddam as embodying the aspirations of his people, and as the product of destiny (Sassoon 2016: 207). The image of Qadhafi as ruler was also superimposed onto the nation through the use of familial metaphors. Songs such 'We are a family, and the leader is our father' (*ihna eyla wil qa'id buna*) represent Qadhafi as both the nation's father and son.⁷⁶ This is a characteristic of authoritarian symbolism that was deployed in Syria, Tunisia, and Iraq (Sassoon 2016: 204). Libyan stamps in 1983 and 1984 also deployed paternal imagery, depicting Qadhafi as a champion of World Health Day and African Children's Day respectively, surrounded by beaming children in traditional Libyan dress.⁷⁷

Despite these commonalities, the *Jamahiriya*'s symbolism was channelled towards different ends from that of the Arab republics. Qadhafi did not deploy symbolism as a part of an attempt to undertake 'symbolic nation building', as was the case in Syria and other post-colonial Arab states (Wedeen 1999: 14-17). The cultivated linkage between ruler and ruled, in the *Jamahiriya*, sought not to absorb the latter, but to displace it. While representing Qadhafi as the origin, representative and focal point of the *Jamahiriya*, the regime anonymised individuals within the public

⁷⁶ "We are a family and the leader is our father". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/84LebM>

⁷⁷ Appendix: Figure 1 and 2. Stuart Aitken.

sphere. Citing the policy of referring to GPC delegates using numbers, rather than their names, a Libyan activist asserted that ‘nobody was allowed to appear to shine, to become well-known or successful, under Qadhafi. Even if someone said something sensible, we wouldn’t know who he or she was. And as soon as that happened, they had to be removed’.⁷⁸ The activist Ahmed recalled his refusal to support the Libyan national football team prior to the 2011 uprising: the anonymity of the players (who were once again referred to using their squad numbers) and the exaggerated centrality of Qadhafi’s son, Al-Saadi, rendered it impossible to identify with the team.⁷⁹ This phenomenon is further elaborated upon by the Libyan dissident Idris al-Tayyeb:

The word ‘diversity’, which connotes the very essence of human life, was completely absent in Libyan political life for over four decades. Only one voice dominated all manifestations of life in Libya...and he sought to dissolve the identities of Libyan citizens into his own, in one of the most brutal acts of repression in modern history. Any attempt by a Libyan citizen to express his or her individuality was criminalised. This started from the suppression of footballers’ names, and continued with the suppression of the names of political officials.⁸⁰

Many of the Libyans interviewed for this research spoke of the way in which Qadhafi had so imposed his own identity onto the country that he inevitably dominated – and even tarnished - the act of publically identifying oneself as a ‘Libyan’ to outsiders. The *Jamahiriya*’s symbolic displacement of the populace functioned alongside its material technologies of control, which undermined the organisational and

⁷⁸ Interview with Aisha, women’s rights activist, 6 April 2016. Skype.

⁷⁹ Interview with Ahmed, social media activist, 25 February 2015. London.

⁸⁰ al-Tayyeb, Idris. “Contexts of diversity in the transitional period” (*seyaq al-tanawwu fil marhala al-haleyya*). *Mayadeen*. 14 June 2011. Issue 6: 18.

representational capacity of Libyans. Together, they indicate Qadhafi's fragmentation and domination of the Libyan body politic.

The *Jamahiriya* created a system of signification that attempted to define and monopolise cultural meanings for its observers. It shaped the visual, symbolic and even temporal realities of Libyan society, cluttering public space with its meanings and demanding their replication, while ideologically freeing itself of any accountability to live up to this self-presentation. Central to the *Jamahiriya*'s system of meaning was not, contrary to the regime's ideology, the concepts of pan-Arab nationalism, anti-colonialism, or religion, but the eulogised image of Qadhafi himself, who in turn became a metonym for the nation. This system of symbolic organisation perpetuated the *Jamahiriya*'s internal contradictions: its enforcement of what it claimed to be a vocabulary of popular will; its creation of narratives that were presented as immutable, historical truths; and the palpable gap between its idealised self-presentation and the political and material reality inside Libya.

5.5 Polysemy and Tolerated Transgression in the *Jamahiriya*

The *Jamahiriya* contained a symbolic system that classified social and political reality, and that propagated those meanings by ritualising their performance in the public sphere. Nevertheless, and despite acknowledging the dominant presence of this symbolism, I diverge from the multi-institutional politics literature, which argues that institutional classifications come to be seen as a 'common sense' and accepted way of doing things (Zucker 1977; Dimaggio and Powell 1991), thereby reproducing 'belief' in the institution (Friedland and Alford 1991: 250). In the following, and in line with

Sewell's concept of 'polysemy' as an empowering resource, I explore the way in which the multiple meanings present within the *Jamahiriya*'s logic of practice were variously reinterpreted, mobilised and subverted by Libyans (Sewell 1992: 19) in ways that enabled them to signal their disbelief in the system while abiding by its 'guidelines for acceptable speech and behaviour' (Wedeen 1999: 6). Libyans were not bereft of agency in relation to this system of meaning: once again, and as with its material technologies of control, they were situated within, and manoeuvred around, the *Jamahiriya*'s contradictory logic.

One of the central 'intra-institutional contradictions' (Jackall 1988) in the *Jamahiriya*, that Libyans recognised and exploited, was the tension between the regime's idealised self-presentation and the palpable reality of everyday life in Libya. This tension was visible in the *Jamahiriya*'s inadequacies as a 'distributive state': for instance, its freezing of public sector wages for decades, and its abandonment of the Italian fascist standards of municipal cleaning that had persisted in the 1960s, and that were recalled by most Libyans living in cities (Wright 2010: 218). However, the gap between ideology and reality became further apparent in the context of unilateral sanctions by the United States in the 1980s and multilateral United Nations sanctions in 1992, which led Libyan people to experience declining living standards, material deprivation and social and economic hardship (Joffé 2016: 122). The *Jamahiriya*'s claim to have delivered 'prosperity' for all Libyans was palpably at odds with reality.

The self-image of the *Jamahiriya* was contested through what have been described as 'methods of disguised expression' inside the country (Al-Werfalli 2011: 32), or what Scott has referred to as 'the world of rumor, gossip, disguises' (1990: 137). According to Scott, this form of expression enables subjugated groups to contest domination and to signal their agency in relation to it, albeit in a concealed manner.

Tareq, an activist who was raised between the UK and Libya, outlined the use of the term ‘the situation’ (*al-wada*) to describe the reality of life in the *Jamahiriya*: ‘there was always a strong tendency to just shy away from speaking about anything political, but there were instances where people would express their displeasure about the state of the country without mentioning the regime’.⁸¹ Thus, to complain about ‘the situation we’re in’ would be to evoke the context of the Qadhafi regime without implicating it directly.

A central method of disguised expression in Libya was the circulation of covert political jokes between confidantes, which constituted a form of social commentary about the *Jamahiriya* and its practices. In the process of narrating jokes, the grandiose rhetoric and image of the regime would be transposed into a series of miniaturised, derisory sketches that both satirised the regime and affirmed its dominance over the public sphere. Humour has also been described as a way of ameliorating the difficulties of everyday life, and as affirming an alternative basis for Libyan collectivity, giving rise to the popular expression: ‘Anyone who wasn’t born a Libyan has missed out on all the fun’ (*il-lee ma jash leebee faatah el-jaw kullah*).⁸²

One series of jokes referenced the economic crisis and ubiquitous food shortages in the 1980s:

One day a man complained that there was no more flour, so security forces quickly arrested him. They took him somewhere where there was a basin full of flour. They dunked his head in it over and over again, asking him, ‘Is there flour or not?’ until he confirmed that there was plenty of flour. He left delighted. People asked him why he was happy, and he said ‘I’m glad I didn’t complain about the shortage in chilli powder!’

⁸¹ Interview with Tareq, social media activist and translator, 14 February 2015. Oxford.

⁸² Interview with Salem, former economic analyst and anti-regime demonstrator, 10 December 2016. Birmingham.

The joke signals that the *Jamahiriya*'s assertions of material prosperity are patently untrue, and that this constitutes widespread knowledge among Libyans. It also explicates the regime's tactic of domination: what it requires is the public performance of compliance, or the acting 'as if' everything is acceptable, even if that means the denial of one's own subjective experiences. Above all, the joke both affirms the strength of the security sector, while suggesting, in the punch line, that ingenuity can help one avoid the worst of its excesses.

Other jokes played on the exaggerated, public declarations of allegiance to Qadhafi:

One day Qadhafi went out hunting. He shot a bird, but he didn't manage to kill it and it escaped. People around him immediately started clapping and chanting, 'It's dead but still flying! al-Fateh! It's dead but still flying! al-Fateh!'

The joke satirises the unspoken directive that all of Qadhafi's actions, however inconsequential or unimpressive, had to be celebrated and ascribed back to the *al-Fateh* (1 September) revolution, even when such celebrations clearly constituted an insincere performance. It mocks the familiar, sycophantic chant *al-Fateh*, which was intermittently uttered during Qadhafi's lengthy public speeches. Again, and similar to the joke about the food shortages, it also signifies the absence of 'belief' in the *Jamahiriya*'s symbolism. The joke also boldly depicts Qadhafi as a tangible and flawed person. In this vein, Igor Cherstich has also argued that Libyans didn't 'passively accept the view of Gaddafi as a "disembodied symbol" put forward by the

propaganda of the regime, but critically engaged with it by questioning it and by creating their own narratives around it' (2014: 95).

Another extensive genre of jokes centred on caricaturing the relationship between Qadhafi and Prime Minister Abdel Salam Jalloud, one of the 1969 Free Officers:

Qadhafi and Jalloud went to the Kremlin, where everything was made of gold. They were sitting in front of a banquet, with gold cutlery laid out. Jalloud sneakily took a golden spoon and put it in his pocket, thinking that nobody had noticed. Qadhafi suddenly stood up and said, 'Now everyone, I'm going to perform a magic feat. I'm going to take this gold spoon, and put it in my pocket...and now Jalloud, take the spoon out of your own pocket!'

The joke reveals that Jalloud was commonly seen as attempting to 'outsmart' Qadhafi, but perpetually failing in his attempts to do so. In this genre of jokes, Qadhafi not only emerges as omniscient, but also as cunning, able to discretely secure his personal wealth in a subtle manner. However, and according to its narrator, the joke is also a covert social commentary on Libyans themselves, demonstrating the opportunistic tendency to 'steal whenever there's a chance' that underpinned the operation of the public sphere.⁸³

Politically themed jokes, particularly those that mentioned Qadhafi, were narrated with circumspection, in the privacy of homes, because of their clearly subversive qualities. However, there was also a more implicit form of humorous, political commentary, exemplified in the entertainment programmes that were broadcast on Libyan state television during the late 1990s onwards, the most famous of which were broadcast during Ramadan. Shows such *They Said It (Galooha)*,

⁸³ Interview with Aisha, women's rights activist, 6 April 2016. Skype.

Spreading It (Eysarha) and *At the End of the Day (Min el-Akhir)* played on the material inadequacies of life in the *Jamahiriyah*, and on the dishonesty and corruption endemic within the public sphere. They also contained mechanisms for tempering the subversive implications of the comedy, in particular, by manipulating the regime's logic of practice in order to avoid implicating it directly. In this respect, they demonstrate that an institution's 'array of resources is capable of being interpreted in varying ways' (Sewell 1992: 19), in ways that signal the presence of agency.

Every episode of *They Said It* would feature a whispering sketch ('Haven't you Heard?') in which mock-rumours were exchanged and pondered between two elderly men over tea. One such rumour focused on the finiteness of the Great Man-Made River:

*Didn't you hear about the Man-Made River? Didn't they say that the River's water would satisfy our needs for more than 50 years...between drinking, and agriculture, and industry and everything else? Well, they're now saying it's draining away, and soon they won't find a single drop left.*⁸⁴

As noted in the previous section, the Great Man-Made River was an important point of adulation in the regime's arsenal of accomplishments. The rumour itself mocks the effusive rhetoric surrounding the irrigation project, while using the third-person pronoun 'they' to avoid explicit reference to Qadhafi himself. Another series of rumours absurdly exaggerates the quality of public services in Libya, from healthcare provision to firefighting:

⁸⁴ "The River's Waters are Draining" (*meyah al-nahr bitanzah*). YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/8fRTzm>

*Didn't you hear about the man who was hit by a bus on the highway? What, you think he died? Don't be silly. When the passengers came to check up on him, they found him standing and arguing with the driver – nothing was wrong with him at all. Apparently, and here's the secret, when the bus hit him, the ambulance came, took him, treated him, and returned him to his spot straight away. All before the passengers had even left the bus.*⁸⁵

By pointing towards the palpable infrastructural deficiencies inside Libya, such rumours indicate a clear collapse in the so-called 'material legitimacy' (Schwarz 2008: 607) of rentier authoritarian regimes. Although, as noted previously, the *Jamahiriya* did not strictly function in a distributive manner, its self-applauding rhetoric certainly drew on its claim to have fulfilled the material needs of Libyan society. Nevertheless, the incendiary potential of such rumours is well contained. The conclusion of each rumour sketch directs attention away from its content and emphasises its unsubstantiated and dubious source: '*So what you're telling me here - did you see it with your own eyes?*' Any hint of culpability is shifted away from the regime and towards the indulgent practice of rumour dissemination.

The redirection of accountability away from the Qadhafi regime, and towards the Libyan public, is a central tenet in the *Jamahiriya*'s logic of practice that was exploited within comedy shows. Sketches in *They Said It* often drew attention to the mismanagement, nepotism and corruption within the Libyan public sector, while affirming the responsibility of Libyans for its operation. One particular sketch, 'Ms. Suheya' (*abla Subheya*), focuses on the superfluity of the many teaching staff in the Education sector, and the short-lived attempt to remedy this, in 2006, through the compilation of staff members deemed 'Surplus to school needs', as part of Saif al-

⁸⁵ "Ambulances" (*sayyarat al-isaf*). YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/Uf7rjA> See also "Fire Engines" (*al-matafi*), a similarly structured sketch. Available at: <https://goo.gl/GPkvZQ>

Islam's drive towards institutional reform. The sketch showcases the virulent, aggressive reactions to what it presents as an eminently sensible policy. One teacher rejects her inclusion on the list on nepotistic grounds: '*How could you place me on the list of surplus teachers, when I was the one who managed your son's wedding from start to finish?*'⁸⁶

Comedy shows in the *Jamahiriyah* identify societal and administrative problems, but affix the responsibility for them onto the Libyan people. For this reason, one activist explained, such shows were not simply 'tolerated', but permitted and indulged in Libya.⁸⁷ According to the ideology of the *Jamahiriyah*, popular self-criticism is a vital component of a direct democracy, and such shows embodied *The Green Book's* mantra that 'society alone supervises itself' (al-Qadhafi 1980: 31). In turn, Qadhafi remained outside of the formal system, and could not therefore be held responsible for the misgovernment of Libyans: a principle that television comedy abided with. In addition to this internal-proofing of each sketch, the conclusion of each season of *They Said It* overtly accounted for any slippages in the rhetoric of compliance. The final episode would see the cast and crew reiterating their allegiance to Qadhafi and apologising for any untoward offense caused, thereby signalling their adherence to a politically correct mode of behaviour.

Satirical comedy demonstrates Sewell's argument that, within a dominant configuration of meaning, 'knowledge of cultural schemas (in this case of interaction rituals) implies the ability to act creatively' (1992: 20). By exploiting the contradiction between the *Jamahiriyah's* material weaknesses and the formal political power accorded to Libyans, comedy could carefully skirt the boundary between compliance and dissent. As an institution, the *Jamahiriyah* both supplied the logic

⁸⁶ "Ms. Subheya" ('*abla subheya*'). YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/N52Raj>

⁸⁷ Interview with Aisha, women's rights activist, 6 April 2016. Skype.

underpinning the dominant symbolic order, and contained the contradiction through which that logic could be exposed. As a result, the agency manifested in the *Jamahiriya*'s tolerated transgressions can be described as 'embedded' or 'partial autonomy' (Thornton and Ocasio 2008: 104) in that it was ultimately imbricated with the reproduction of its symbolic system.

Tolerated transgressions in the online sphere further demonstrate the exploitable polysemy of institutional meaning. The popular Facebook page 'It Happens Only in Libya' (*Yahduth faqat fe leebya*) was created by the young engineer Osama, prior to the Libyan uprising, as a way of displaying humorous images of Libya's social, infrastructural and bureaucratic failings. He argues that his objective was to undermine Qadhafi, but that at the time, 'you had to know the rules to play the game...don't mention Qadhafi, his family, or his closest associates, and you could criticise the system as much as you wanted to'.⁸⁸ In an interview with *Al-Jamahiriya* TV in November 2010, in which he was quizzed about the Facebook page by the anchor Hala Misrati, he asserted that the page had sensible, reformist intentions: 'there are red lines we can't cross...Libyan citizens and state institutions must ultimately take responsibility for this chaos'.⁸⁹ Indeed, Osama even justified the propriety of the page to Misrati by explicitly quoting Qadhafi's saying that 'in a direct democracy, society alone supervises itself'.⁹⁰

Housam's Facebook page and Libyan television comedies evince the assertion that acts of subversion within a repressive system 'will largely observe the "rules" even if their objective is to undermine them' (Scott 1990: 93). Outside of Libya, symbolic contestation was not so deferential. Websites such as Libya Al-Mostakbal,

⁸⁸ Interview with Osama, reformist anti-regime demonstrator in Tripoli, 30 December 2015. Skype.

⁸⁹ "It Happens Only in Libya...On Air" (*yahduth faqat fe Libya...ala al-hawa*). YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/4zzBSs>

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Libya Watanona, Al-Manarah Media, and Akhbar Libya, established in the late 1990s and early 2000s by UK-based dissidents, attempted to ‘destabilise the regime, confuse it...chip at it from all directions’.⁹¹ They challenged Qadhafi’s monopoly over public meaning, supplying alternative historical narratives of the country, and exhibiting Libyan artwork, music and folk poetry that were disconnected from the image of the *Jamahiriya*.⁹² The opposition writer Fathi el-Fadhli published a short book on Libya Al-Mostakbal in which he envisaged an alternative political system for the country post-Qadhafi.⁹³ Such websites also undermined the self-aggrandising representational practices of the regime by mocking its rhetoric and by displaying satirical caricatures of Qadhafi and his family (York 2012). One Canadian-based Libyan rapper created anti-Qadhafi music and disseminated it online, through such websites and in Arab and Libyan forums, with the purpose of undermining the regime, arguing that ‘even if it was only Qadhafi’s security forces, I knew there was an audience’.⁹⁴ However, although these forms of symbolic contestation did not abide with the regime’s logic of practice, affixing the blame principally on Qadhafi and his inner circle, it has been conceded that such challenges had little hope of shaping the discursive realities inside Libya. Many of the opposition’s websites were blocked (OpenNet 2009); when they were periodically unblocked, ‘they would still be monitoring them...not many people would risk accessing Libya Al-Mostakbal in an Internet café’.⁹⁵

There were a few instances in which a visible breakdown of the *Jamahiriya*’s symbolic authority occurred inside Libya. In those moments, public events ostensibly

⁹¹ Interview with Fayezi, exiled anti-regime dissident, 27 January 2016. London.

⁹² An extended 25 page ‘alternative history’ of Benghazi by Libyan journalist Fathalla Ibbewu, published on Libya Al-Mostakbal, describes the toleration of ideological pluralism under the monarchy, extensively ridicules the Qadhafi regime’s laws and newspapers, and attacks the Libyan leader’s closest aides. Available at: <https://goo.gl/Vy55kj>

⁹³ el-Fadhli, Fathi. “The Political Alternative in Libya...and the post-Revolution State” (*al-badeel al seyasi fe Libya...wa dawlat ma ba’d al thawra*). Libya Watanona. 26 August 2006. Available at: <https://goo.gl/Tu55NR>

⁹⁴ Interview with Fawzi. 29 December 2015. Skype.

⁹⁵ Interview with Osama, reformist anti-regime demonstrator in Tripoli, 30 December 2015. Skype.

convened for one purpose ‘serve as opportunities to briefly and quickly assert broad oppositional claims’ (Johnston 2015: 630). Football-related protests broke out in Tripoli in 1989, and in Benghazi in 2000, and were transformed into riots against the Qadhafi regime that were swiftly and brutally suppressed (Hilsum 2012: 84). Similarly, a large demonstration took place in front of the Italian consulate in Benghazi on 17 February 2006, initially against the publication of the Prophet Muhammad cartoons; however, it escalated into an anti-regime protest that was violently quashed over a period of days (BBC 2006). Such events were explained away by the regime as acts of hooliganism and opportunism, and Libyan activists continue to disagree over their long-term symbolic significance.⁹⁶

The most prominent protests in Libya, prior to the 2011 uprising, were those undertaken by families of the men killed in the 1996 Abu Slim massacre. Represented by the young lawyer Fathi Terbil, a large number of families refused to accept financial compensation from the Qadhafi regime for the deaths, and protested outside the Benghazi Courthouse every Saturday from 2007 until the onset of the uprising in 2011 (Khalil 2014: 97). In many respects, these demonstrations were a striking and disarming visual spectacle, comprised largely of elderly women, widows and children: a far sight from the occasional football riot in Libya.⁹⁷ However, the Abu Slim justice movement continued to operate under the mantle of Saif al-Islam Qadhafi’s International Charity and Development Foundation (Hilsum 2012: 104). As

⁹⁶ George Joffé (2016: 124) has argued that the 2006 Benghazi demonstration engendered a spirit of public protest in the city and undermined the regime’s sense of invulnerability. Libyan activists such as Ahmed and Fawzi affirmed this interpretation of the event’s significance, and deployed the date of 17 February as a symbolic marker in their mobilisation efforts. According to Fawzi, it was a ‘defining point for the city of Benghazi’. Other activists inside Benghazi, such as Marwa and Mansour, saw the riots as the work of disruptive individuals, rather than as the empowering act of a whole city, and claimed that most people simply wanted them to be over.

⁹⁷ According to the Libyan politician Hussein, videos of the protests were filmed by demonstrators inside Benghazi before being uploaded onto YouTube and disseminated online by exiled dissidents, in what was a coordinated effort to undermine the regime. For footage of the protests from 2008 and 2009, see: <https://goo.gl/BJXcm1> and <https://goo.gl/bx2Lg6>

a result, it upheld the regime's unspoken logic of practice: protesters demanded accountability and punishment for 'the executors', but without ever naming Qadhafi's head of internal security, Abdullah al-Sanussi, who was widely held to be responsible for the massacre.⁹⁸

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the *Jamahiriya* as an institution possessive of material and symbolic technologies of domination, which together constituted an ordering of reality, or 'institutional logic'. Its material practices of domination centred on an extensive coercive apparatus and a system of governance that undermined the organisational and representational capacities of Libyan society. In turn, symbolic practices situated Qadhafi as a metonym for the '*Jamahiriya*', cluttering public space and compelling Libyans, through an assortment of ritualised practices, to reproduce the symbolic order of the institution (Friedland and Alford 1991: 250). This symbolic order was ultimately an exclusionary one: it defined the Libyan nation as a collective principally devoted to sustaining Qadhafi's 1969 'Al-Fateh Revolution', and actualised this definition of power and prestige, within its material landscape, by rewarding political commitment and obedience to Qadhafi's revolution through mechanisms of patronage. I argue that the *Jamahiriya*'s logic of practice fundamentally involved the upholding of contradictory and incommensurate claims, particularly regarding the bifurcation of 'formal' and 'informal' authority that saw Libyans saddled with political accountability with no corresponding political representation.

⁹⁸ Interview with Hussein, NTC representative, 7 November 2016. London.

As argued within the multi-institutional politics literature, all institutions, however dominant, not only regularise behaviour but supply opportunities for agency (Thornton and Occasio 2008: 102). This chapter has stressed that the ‘polysemy of resources’ within an institution provide room for semiotic manoeuvre, or the ‘creative transposition’ of existent meanings’ (Sewell 1992: 18-21). Libyans could exploit the internal contradictions within this authoritarian logic of practice; materially, through extractive practices, and symbolically, by cloaking potentially subversive claims in the *Jamahiriya*’s own rhetoric of popular accountability. As a result, it was not the case that Libyan society was ‘unable to contemplate or express any ideas beyond those espoused by Qadhafi’ (Vandewalle 2015: 23). Nevertheless, although the *Jamahiriya*’s institutional hold ‘on our processes of classifying and recognizing’ (Douglas 1986: 3) may have been weak, its capacity to impose publically political representations remained strong.

Having supplied an account of the structural status quo prior to the Libyan uprising, the following two chapters will examine the emergence of political agency during the 2011 Libyan uprising in relation to the *Jamahiriya*’s logic of practice. Political agency will be analysed as a form of open, contentious articulation that was both strategic, seeking to encourage political mobilisation, and symbolic, seeking the creation of alternative political subjectivities.

Agency as Strategic Articulation: ‘Framing’ the Libyan Uprising

6.1 Introduction

The former chapter argued that Muammar al-Qadhafi anchored popular political agency within the Libyan *Jamahiriya*’s ‘institutional logic’. Libyans demonstrated what can be described as ‘embedded’ autonomy (Thornton and Occasio 2008: 104): they were compelled to publically reproduce the *Jamahiriya*’s material and symbolic technologies of control, while manoeuvring within its inconsistencies in order to both sustain their material interests and to signal their private eschewal of its symbolic order. This chapter will counterpoise this structural interpretation by focusing on the emergence of political agency as an openly articulated, contentious and strategic phenomenon during the 2011 Libyan uprising. It is grounded in the theoretical premise that ‘historical watershed’ events (Sewell 1999: 52) create political actors who are capable of producing new, social constructions of reality.

The following discussion deploys social movement framing theory (Snow et al 1986; Snow and Benford 1988) in order to investigate agency as a meaning making practice, and meaning making as strategic in intent: in this instance, directed towards political mobilisation against the Qadhafi regime. The first section of this chapter outlines the organisational vehicles and networks that emerged within the Libyan opposition movement in 2011, and which facilitated the dissemination of strategic representations, or ‘framings’, of social reality. It emphasises the way in which these

networks were comprised of a mixture of pre-existent and emergent clusters of political activists, or ‘social movement entrepreneurs’. As a result, the legitimacy and reach of their representational practices derived from the collaboration of an assortment of geographically, ideologically and generationally diverse political activists and opposition figures.

The subsequent, and central, section of this chapter outlines the collective action frames that Libyan activists produced and promulgated during the course of the Libyan uprising, and which offered ‘strategic interpretations of issues with the intention of mobilizing people to act’ (Noakes and Johnston 2015: 5). These framings strategically packaged the empirical sequence of anti-regime protests, regime violence and military conflict as a seamless narrative of popular, emancipatory revolt. In addition, these emergent understandings also existed in a ‘dialogic’ (Steinberg 2002: 208) relation with the *Jamahiriya*’s institutional logic. In particular, diagnostic framing exposed Qadhafi’s incongruous attribution of political agency to the Libyan people. As a result, the Libyan opposition movement referenced a discourse that it broadly sought to refute, while also amplifying values – such as ‘freedom’ and ‘self-determination’ – that were common in the *Jamahiriya*’s terrain of meaning.

The chapter concludes by engaging reflexively with the framing perspective, problematising the relationship between strategy and meaning making practices that it presents. Social movement theory has customarily presented these as complementary and mutually reinforcing dimensions of political agency (Benford and Snow 2000: 614). However, and drawing on the preceding discussion, I indicate the ways in which a strategic orientation towards mobilisation occasionally undercut Libyan activists’ attempts to articulate and reconstitute social reality as they experienced it during the uprising.

6.2 Networks of Framing in the Libyan Uprising

The sporadic outbreak of the first anti-regime protests in Libya, from 15 to 25 February 2011, suggests that the uprising was decentralised in nature. Across Libya, demonstrations varied in location and in form. Rippling outwards from the East to the West, they were at times peaceful, but occasionally spiralled into violent confrontations with the regime (Sawani 2014: 78). In Benghazi, small groups of university students had agreed to protest on 17 February, in accordance with the directives issued on multiple Facebook groups, but adjusted their protest plans following the arrest of the lawyer for the Abu Slim families, Fathi Terbil, on 15 February.⁹⁹ Such was the radical impact of the arrest that according to the Libyan Youth Movement's Ahmed, who had helped issue those Facebook directives, 'if it wasn't for the Abu Slim guys, I don't think anything would have ever happened'.¹⁰⁰ In Tripoli, protests first broke out in earnest on 20 February, and even then came as a surprise to those who had called for them.¹⁰¹ The unpredictable nature of the demonstrations appears to validate the assessment of the Arab uprisings as 'horizontal', devoid of clearly identifiable or hierarchically positioned leaders (Bamyeh 2011a; Korany 2014; Sutherland et al 2014; Esposito et al 2016).

However, even if protests in Libya emerged without an overarching leadership or organisational structure, they were swiftly interpreted, packaged and framed in increasingly systematic ways. Political actors who construct and disseminate collective action frames in such a way have been described as 'social movement entrepreneurs' (Noakes and Johnston 2005). The term is arguably an imperfect one – it unintentionally connotes a drive towards personal gain, for instance (ibid: 7) – but it

⁹⁹ Interview with Hamza, anti-regime demonstrator and civil society activist, 4 April 2015. London.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Ahmed, social media activist, 25 February 2015. London.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Ali, rebel coordinator and fighter in Tripoli, 9 February 2015. Skype.

does capture the notion that promoting a message and a cause necessitates a degree of strategic initiative. The Libyan uprising saw the emergence of social movement entrepreneurs: clusters of political activists, principally in the diaspora, and political figures, belonging to the National Transitional Council (NTC), who comprised a ‘partially organized order’ (Den Hon et al 2015) of collaborative groups and networks. Together, they framed the revolutionary cause to foreign audiences, bystanders, and Libyans residing inside the country.

The Libyan NTC, which convened its first meeting in Benghazi on 27 February 2011, and was formally established on 5 March, characterised itself in its founding declaration as the ‘only legitimate body representing the Libyan people and the Libyan state’,¹⁰² possessing a form of sovereign authority that was sufficient to administer and manage the Libyan revolution and its post-Qadhafi transitional phase (Sawani and Pack 2013: 523). Its stated aim was to ‘steer Libya during the interim period that will come after its complete liberation and the destruction of the Gaddafi regime’.¹⁰³ During the course of the uprising, it effectively formed an interim transitional government. As argued by Mezran and Knecht (2015: 86), ‘the rapid formation of the NTC was a stroke of public diplomacy genius with profound implications for the rebel war effort’. Its framing of the protests, and the subsequent military conflict in Libya, as the expression of a collective, popular struggle for democracy in the country, was ultimately geared towards the attainment of strategic goals: the acquisition of Western military, financial and diplomatic support for the uprising, the mobilisation of tribes and revolutionary fighters in the military conflict, and economic assistance in the unfreezing of Libyan assets abroad (Bartu 2015).

¹⁰² The Interim Transitional National Council. “Introducing the Council”. Available at: <https://goo.gl/zyzERX>

¹⁰³ Ibid.

The NTC's claim to possessing both popular credibility and 'professional expertise' (Noakes and Johnston 2005: 13) partly rested on its diverse internal composition. It drew together a range of figures - exiled regime opponents, political reformists, technocrats, academics, journalists and lawyers – with varying proficiencies, histories of political engagement with the regime, and complementary public images. The interim Prime Minister, Mahmoud Jibril, head of the NEDB under Saif al-Islam Qadhafi, was able to draw on the connections he established at the time in his attempts to persuade Western countries to recognise and support the NTC (Mezran and Knecht 2015: 82). Mahmoud Shammam and Ali Tarhouni, the NTC's information minister and finance minister respectively, were credible and longstanding opponents of the Qadhafi regime,¹⁰⁴ whereas the NTC's official spokesman, Abdul Hafiz Ghoga, was a prominent reformist lawyer for the Abu Slim movement for victims' families. In turn, where Jibril and Shammam were noted for their secular leanings (Dawisha 2013: 156), Mustafa Abdul Jalil, Libya's former minister of justice and the NTC's chairman, was described as a religiously devout and uncontroversial figure, on whom everyone could agree to unite: 'the lowest common denominator'.¹⁰⁵

The NTC's retroactive narrative of the protests was authoritatively addressed to a diverse array of audiences: from foreign governments, to the European Parliament, to tribes affiliated with the Qadhafi regime. According to the NTC member Hussein, 'one of our main responsibilities during the revolution was to spread a positive, united message about Libya', and to do so through multiple appearances and interviews on satellite television across the world, particularly in the first month of the uprising.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Mustafa, anti-regime dissident and human rights campaigner, 4 March 2015. London.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Hussein, NTC representative, 7 November 2016. London.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Hussein, NTC representative, 7 November 2016. London.

To some extent, the NTC's 'united' message reshaped and even homogenised the existent political rhetoric circling in Benghazi, the principal opposition stronghold, particularly by rescinding a statement by the lawyer-led 17 February Coalition in which the group had warned off outside intervention (Mezran and Knecht 2015: 86).

Nevertheless, the NTC argued that its legitimacy ultimately derived from the revolution itself, and from 'the decisions of local councils set up by the revolutionary people of Libya on the 17th of February...the Council consists of thirty one members representing the various cities of Libya from the east to the west and from the north to the south'.¹⁰⁷ Its founding statement on 5 March 2011 emphasised 'that the most important role is the one played by the youth...they were the base of foundation of the revolution'.¹⁰⁸ Abdul Jalil stressed that its very formation was a bottom-up and inclusive process,¹⁰⁹ and Shammam emphasised their connection to the 'battalion of forward-thinking youth' who had called for and instigated the protests.¹¹⁰ In turn, the ability to 'communicate' cogently the organic, youth-generated goals of the uprising was, according to a number of activists, the central responsibility that they expected the NTC to fulfil.¹¹¹

The NTC formally emerged as an authoritative player almost two weeks after the first protests erupted in Libya. Its presence was thus preceded by a dynamic network of young activists in the diaspora, who played an equally prominent – if distinct - role in propounding a narrative of revolution to participants, bystanders and outsiders. The phenomenon of tech-savvy youth deploying digital technologies for

¹⁰⁷ The Interim Transitional National Council. "Introducing the Council". Available at: <https://goo.gl/zyzERX>

¹⁰⁸ National Transitional Council. "Founding Statement of the Interim Transitional Council (TNC)". 5 March 2011. Archived at: <https://goo.gl/2j2igw>

¹⁰⁹ "Interview with Mustafa Abdul Jalil". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/qZ7LJk>

¹¹⁰ "Interview with Mahmud Shammam". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/u4uCdP>

¹¹¹ Interview with Maryam, social media activist, 3 February 2015. Skype; Interview with Abdullah, civil society activist in Zawiya, 28 March 2015. Tunisia; Interview with Hisham, pro-opposition medical doctor, 5 December 2016. Skype.

radical political ends was, in some ways, as present in the contentious Libyan landscape as it was in Egypt and Tunisia (Lindgren 2013; Biswas and Sipes 2014). Between the end of January and 15 February 2011, there was a rapid increase in the number of Facebook pages and social media platforms calling for protests, preparing and disseminating chants, and framing symbolic dates of significance, such as the 17 February 2006 demonstrations in Benghazi (Strakes 2016: 152). Marwa, who protested in Benghazi, noted her familiarity with the existence of these pages, but argued that knowledge of them was not necessarily widespread and that their determining influence was difficult to gauge.¹¹² This sentiment was also repeated by Ali, who protested in Tripoli.¹¹³ Ultimately, I concur with Hasan and Staggenborg (2015: 350) who highlight the importance of youth using digital technologies, not as the central factor in mobilising citizens, but as helping to sustain the goals of political activists. Indeed, this function came to prominence following, and not prior to, the emergence of the first protests in Libya.

Online activist networks differed in the communicative tools they chose to deploy in order to sustain the momentum of the protests. The Libyan Youth Movement (LYM), also known as ‘Shabab Libya’, was the largest and most prominent group, with around 30 activists supporting its Twitter and Facebook operations around the world. Its Twitter account accumulated over 50 thousand followers over the course of the uprising (Biswas and Sipes 2014: 6). Established in January 2011 by Ayat Mneina and Omar Amer, from Canada and the UK respectively, its initial purpose was to mobilise for protests across Libya, and it modelled itself on Egypt’s April 6 Movement, which it perceived to be inclusive and

¹¹² Interview with Marwa, civil society activist in Benghazi, 23 January 2016. London.

¹¹³ Interview with Abdullah, civil society activist in Zawiya, 28 March 2015. Tunisia.

without a specific political affiliation.¹¹⁴ LibyaFeb17 was an independent website created by the UK-based activist Tareq on 15 February, and which garnered over one million hits in its first month.¹¹⁵ Also inspired by the events of Egypt and Tunisia, it was established with the specific purpose, not of mobilising for protests, but of providing real-time coverage of them should they occur. On Facebook, the largest anti-regime page, ‘The Uprising of 17 February 2011 – Let Us Make It a Day of Rage in Libya’ was created on 28 January by Hassan al-Jahmi, an exiled dissident based in Switzerland, with extensive connections to the political opposition group the NFSL.¹¹⁶

These activist networks collectively adopted what has been described as a ‘strategic or marketing orientation’ (Noakes and Johnston 2005: 13) towards the materials they sourced. Hassan al-Jahmi corresponded directly with broadcasters such as CNN and Al Jazeera in order to amplify the reach of the videos, images and recordings that he had obtained from inside Libya.¹¹⁷ In this sense, social media pages were not a challenger to traditional media outlets, but a tactical collaborator, supplying information and contacts to traditional media in exchange for the publicisation of their message.¹¹⁸ Demonstrators such as Maryam al-Ageli were emboldened to send video footage to Al-Jazeera ‘after we saw how keen they were to publish those clips’.¹¹⁹ Similarly, LYM had prepared a database of contacts in Libya from which to transmit information to satellite television channels, should a media blackout occur (Lindgren 2013: 221).

¹¹⁴ Interview with Ahmed, social media activist, 25 February 2015. London.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Tareq, social media activist and translator, 14 February 2015. Oxford.

¹¹⁶ “Interview with Hassan al-Jahmi, Al-Hurra TV”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/GUrz85>

¹¹⁷ “Interview with Hassan al-Jahmi, Al-Jazeera”. YouTube. <https://goo.gl/YsGwWJ>

¹¹⁸ “Omar Amer interview with ABC News”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/c72n9T>

¹¹⁹ al-Ageli, Maryam “What happened” (*matha hadath*). *Mayadeen*. 8 May 2011. Issue 1: 7.

Social media activists also displayed a strong degree of collaboration with each other, ‘sharing different strategies on how to promote each others’ work’.¹²⁰ In order to further emphasise their credibility, LYM implemented advice on how to come across as objective and dispassionate in their Tweets, abandoning the ‘panicky, all caps’ mode of communication that they had adopted in the initial days of protests.¹²¹ Both LibyaFeb17 and LYM argued that they had no option but to approach their communicative tasks with a strategic mind-set, asserting that they ‘didn’t have time to stress, or the luxury to rant at someone’,¹²² and that ‘there was an unspoken assumption that we were there just to push information out...we didn’t even react’.¹²³ Indeed, LYM even organised its activists into ‘shifts’ corresponding with their time-zones, ‘recruiting’ further volunteers and assistance via its private Facebook group, and allocating specific tasks to its members depending on their respective skillsets.¹²⁴

Social media activists stressed the credibility and salience of their reporting by pointing towards the veracity of their ‘vetted’ sources,¹²⁵ but like the NTC, they also represented this as the foundation of their discursive legitimacy. Tareq of LibyaFeb17 argued that he did not seek to impose his own understandings or political inclinations onto the Libyan uprising, but to broadcast ‘the authentic voices of Libyans...to facilitate understanding but also ease of comprehension because of my knowledge of the Libyan dialect’.¹²⁶ Another activist, Huda, asserted that because of their relative position of privilege – residing in the West yet closely connected to the happenings inside the country– they had a pronounced ‘responsibility’ to speak and to advocate

¹²⁰ Interview with Tareq, social media activist and translator, 14 February 2015. Oxford.

¹²¹ Interview with Maryam, social media activist, 3 February 2011. Skype.

¹²² Interview with Tareq, social media activist and translator, 14 February 2015. Oxford.

¹²³ Interview with Maryam, social media activist, 3 February 2011. Skype.

¹²⁴ Interview with Ahmed, social media activist, 25 February 2015. London.

¹²⁵ Interview with Maryam, social media activist, 3 February 2011. Skype.

¹²⁶ Interview with Tareq, social media activist and translator, 14 February 2015. Oxford.

for the Libyan uprising.¹²⁷ Moreover, as the war in Libya turned into a military stalemate, a number of diaspora activists travelled to the country, due to be a need to be more strategically relevant to the happenings on the ground. Ahmed and Tareq travelled to Benghazi and Zintan respectively in order to report on the uprising, noting the frustrating sense of distance and stagnancy that came with remaining in the UK. Yahya collaborated with LYM in the initial stages of the uprising, before travelling to report on the humanitarian situation in Misrata, then ultimately working with the NTC as a tactical coordinator.¹²⁸ The rapper Fawzi initially mobilised for protests from Canada, but travelled to fight in the western mountains region of Libya in June 2011, providing updates and blog posts that were then republished by other social media activists.¹²⁹ Young activists thus occupied shifting positions of proximity in relation to the uprising, alternately shaping both the content and the reach of revolutionary messaging.

The final, central sources of collective action framing in the Libyan uprising were the Arabic language media outlets that were rapidly established inside and outside the country (Strakes 2016: 148). The most prominent was the satellite media channel Libya Al-Ahrar ('Libya of the Free'), established by the NTC's information minister Mahmud Shammam on March 2011, with its studio in Doha and with Qatar transmitting its signal (Nardulli 2015: 342). Positioning itself as a counterweight to the propaganda of Al-Jamahiriyah TV, Libya Al-Ahrar served as a central proselytising outlet for the uprising and for 'the revolutionaries fighting in Libya'.¹³⁰ It supplied on-going political commentary and news updates on the progress of the military conflict, in addition to a host of television programmes, from talk shows to comedy series, that

¹²⁷ Interview with Huda, Libyan-American social media activist, 9 June 2016. Skype.

¹²⁸ Interview with Yahya, activist and NTC coordinator, 29 November 2016. Skype.

¹²⁹ Interview with Fawzi, revolutionary fighter in western Libya, 29 December 2015. Skype.

¹³⁰ @libyaalahrartv, 12 June 2011. 4.50pm. Tweet.

suggested the diversity and vibrancy of Libya's newly-fashioned discursive sphere. In a later vindication of the channel, the presenter Mahmoud al-Werfalli argued that 'Libya Al-Ahrar emerged from the heart of the revolution...Qadhafi had five, six, channels, and we had one, but we managed to completely transform public opinion inside Libya'.¹³¹

What was distinctive about Libya Al-Ahrar was not only its reach and viewership inside Libya itself (unlike social media activity on Twitter), but the fact that its collectivist rhetoric was grounded in and legitimated through its recruitment of presenters, technicians, and managers from across the Libyan revolutionary spectrum. Mohammed Ismail, who photographed the demonstrations outside the Libyan embassy in London, was actively sought out to work on Libya Al-Ahrar's website, and flown out to Qatar within 10 days.¹³² Similarly, Tareq was contacted directly by Shammam, and offered a permanent position to work as a web-developer for Libya Al-Ahrar within two weeks.¹³³ In addition to recruiting journalists, activists and academics residing outside Libya, Libya Al-Ahrar hired defected presenters from the Libyan Youth Channel (*Al-Shababiya*), which was part of the Jamahiriya Broadcasting Authority. Despite Shammam's secularist leanings, Libya Al-Ahrar also promoted religious sermons and rulings from clerics such as Sadeq al-Ghariani. Thus, the channel had an accelerated and avowedly inclusive recruitment drive, attempting to 'promote the diversity agenda'.¹³⁴ This supplied it with a basis on which it could credibly claim to 'work with Libyan abilities and intellects, to address all Libyans with a language that is close to their hearts'.¹³⁵

¹³¹ "A Discussion between Mahmoud al-Werfalli and Mohammed Mhsen on Libya Al-Ahrar". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/u8sBH6>

¹³² Interview with Umar, journalist and photographer, 14 January 2016. Skype.

¹³³ Interview with Tareq, social media activist and translator, 14 February 2015. Oxford.

¹³⁴ Interview with Hussein, NTC representative, 7 November 2016. London.

¹³⁵ "The opening of Libya Al-Ahrar". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/LNQErM>

In some respects, the print-based counterparts to Libya Al-Ahrar – in terms of its reach – were the Arabic-language newspapers *Al-Manarah* and *Mayadeen*. *Al-Manarah* was established in 2002 by exiled Libyan dissidents in the UK, initially as an online news platform.¹³⁶ It intensified its online reporting during the uprising (on its own website, and on a newly-created Facebook page), but also published a print edition from June 2011, that was subsequently distributed across all opposition-controlled territories in Libya. *Mayadeen*, established in Benghazi in May 2011, described itself as ‘the first independent newspaper in Libya for four decades’, and was also supported by opposition figures abroad and by the NTC.¹³⁷ As with Libya Al-Ahrar, the legitimacy of these newspapers as framing outlets rested on their assimilation and broadcast of a diverse range of revolutionary voices - from NTC members, to civil society activists, to leaders of military battalions across the country – which were wrapped around the central objective of liberating Libya from the Qadhafi regime. On occasion, both *Al-Manarah* and *Mayadeen* were more outwardly critical of the NTC’s activities, and of the trajectory of the uprising as a whole, than Libya Al-Ahrar.

As argued by Meyer (2002: 19), the ‘structural accommodation’ of diversity can enable a particular movement to thrive and increase its following. Collective action framing during the Libyan uprising was undertaken, not simply by Arab media outlets such as Al-Jazeera (Bebawai and Bossio 2014), but by Libyans themselves, and structurally accommodated a range of actors from disparate political, ideological and generational backgrounds. Such actors deployed strategic initiative in the ways in which they communicated and coordinated their discursive activities, both internally

¹³⁶ Al-Manarah on Twitter: <https://goo.gl/HiFkAX>, and on its website: <https://goo.gl/bY62t8>

¹³⁷ “Mayadeen...Libya’s first independent newspaper in four decades” (*Mayadeen...awwal jareeda mustaqila fil leebya munth arbaat uqood*). *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*. 4 May 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/MbUrKt>

amongst themselves, and externally, to the international community and other outsiders. Although the ‘Libyan story’ has been described as ‘one of disparate, loosely connected domestic and foreign actors, linking up harmoniously like the unlikely of symphony orchestras’ (Mezran and Knecht 2015: 81), this linkage was not arbitrary but to some extent cultivated by the actors themselves.

6.3 Collective Action Framing

The collective action frames produced by Libyan opposition actors and networks were overwhelmingly cohesive in nature, and directed towards enabling the overthrow of the Qadhafi regime. The following section will outline the understandings supplied by this ‘partially organized’ order of activists, signalling the way in which they resonated with the unfolding political reality on the ground, and with the meanings - and contradictions - present within the *Jamahiriya*’s institutional logic.

6.3.1 Diagnostic Framing

‘Diagnostic framing’ has been identified as a central framing task that anchors the mobilising rhetoric and meaning making practices of social movement actors.

Involving the ‘identification of the source(s) of causality, blame and/or culpable action’ (Benford and Snow 2000: 615), diagnostic framing customarily negotiates a shared understanding of what needs to be changed within a particular socio-political context. It is a powerful rhetorical mechanism, potentially redefining the way in which people conceptualise ‘injustice’ (Snow et al 1986: 475), and re-evoking suppressed contentious meanings into new grievances (Gamson 1992). In the framing

of the Libyan uprising, ultimate culpability for a range of injustices, exemplified in but not restricted to violence against Libyan protesters, consistently rested on Qadhafi himself. According to one activist, the claim that ‘Qadhafi was the devil’ underpinned the entire thrust of the revolutionary narrative in 2011.¹³⁸ Jason Pack (2013b) has argued that the Libyan uprising, in a similar manner to other protests in the Arab world, was most cogent in articulating a negative vision of what it stood *against*, i.e. the Qadhafi regime.

A collective consensus on Qadhafi’s culpability did not precede the protests, but emerged due to their unfolding political dynamics, and as a result of the regime’s use of violence against protestors. The Abu Slim lawyers’ movement in Benghazi, which initiated the first protests on 15 February, refrained from explicitly identifying Qadhafi as the source of Libya’s problems. Where other Facebook pages were calling for a ‘day of rage’, the lawyer Abdelsalam al-Mismari had been in contact with youth activists on Facebook throughout February 2011, advising them instead to pursue a ‘gradual trajectory...the demands must begin with reform, a constitution and social justice’.¹³⁹ Once protests began, the lawyers outside the Benghazi courthouse directed their ire at financial corruption and underdevelopment, with Abdul Hafiz Ghoga asserting on 16 February that ‘the administrative structure of the state’ should be responsible for solving these issues.¹⁴⁰ This was a familiar refrain in reformist political rhetoric under Qadhafi.¹⁴¹ The movement of lawyers and academics would finally embrace the calls to topple the regime after Saif al-Islam Qadhafi’s

¹³⁸ Interview with Yahya, activist and NTC coordinator, 29 November 2016. Skype.

¹³⁹ al-Mismari, Abdelsalam. “The goodness of Libyans was the main factor in the success of the revolution” (*inbiath al-fadail dakhil al-Leebiyeen amil najah al-thawra*). *Mayadeen*. 22 May 2011. Issue 3: 6.

¹⁴⁰ “Abdul Hafiz Ghoga supports the tyrant’s regime”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/8qDz8i>

¹⁴¹ Interview with Osama, reformist anti-regime demonstrator in Tripoli, 30 December 2015. Skype.

representative, Bashir Harir, ignored their calls for a ceasefire on 17 February.¹⁴²

According to the lawyer Salwa al-Deghali, ‘it was when the bloodshed began that we called for an end to the regime’.¹⁴³

Diagnostic framing in the Libyan uprising was distilled into two distinctive narratives of culpability. The first was urgent and immediate, framing Qadhafi as criminally responsible for the brutality committed by security services towards civilian protesters in Benghazi and other cities. In the first week of protests, reports extensively circled in the media of Qadhafi’s forces opening fire with live ammunition, and killing at least 1000 unarmed protesters (Lynch 2012: 112), with later reports by the International Criminal Court (ICC) estimating this to be between 500-700 people (Simons and MacFarquhar 2011). Libyan activists framed this as an escalating sequence of consecutive massacres, deploying emotive rhetoric, graphic footage from the attacks, and interlacing their reports with fearful eyewitness statements from residents and protesters. Within the first week of protests, LibyaFeb17 reported massacres taking place in different cities: in Benghazi, with over 50 killed in a mortar attack and 200 dead in Al-Jala Hospital,¹⁴⁴ massacres of soldiers in Derna for not firing on protesters,¹⁴⁵ and ‘eyewitness accounts of Tripoli massacres after Friday Prayer’.¹⁴⁶ From the inception of the protests, LYM described the assault on Benghazi as a massacre, with reference to footage from CNN: ‘200 died in one hospital in Benghazi...there is no question now it was a massacre’.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² “Interview with Abdel Hafiz Ghoga”. *Mayadeen*, 1 May 2011. Issue 1: 11.

¹⁴³ al-Deghali, Salwa. “When the bloodshed began, we called for an end to the regime” (*heyne sal al-dam asbaha al-matlab isqat al-nitham*). *Mayadeen*. 1 May 2011. Issue 1: 16.

¹⁴⁴ “Breaking: a massacre in Benghazi”. *LibyaFeb17*. 19 February 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/dtMmcy>

¹⁴⁵ “Breaking: soldiers killed in Derna”. *Ibid*. 23 February 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/ZTLeMG>

¹⁴⁶ “Breaking: eyewitness accounts of Tripoli massacres”. *Ibid*. 26 February 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/wWcD7i>

¹⁴⁷ @ShababLibya. 20 February 2011. 5.34am. Tweet.

The concept of a Qadhafi-instigated massacre was central to the urgent diagnostic framing of the Libyan uprising, and was amplified by reports of Qadhafi deploying mercenaries from Sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe in an attempt to crush the protests (Smith 2011). On 16 February 2011, LYM tweeted of ‘increasing reports of mercenaries from Chad who are being well paid #Libya #Feb17 if so, then we are at war’.¹⁴⁸ This was corroborated by Al-Manarah Media, which claimed confirmation of the presence of African mercenaries in Western Libya,¹⁴⁹ and by Hassan al-Jahmi’s Facebook page, which uploaded videos of ‘children killed by mercenaries and snipers’ onto YouTube.¹⁵⁰ Activists not only framed existent regime violence as evidence of a massacre, and even, on one instance, as ‘genocide’;¹⁵¹ they also warned of imminent massacres on 21 March: ‘Breaking: Two busloads of Gaddafi forces & 11 Tanks enter Misratah preparing for massacre tomorrow’.¹⁵² Qadhafi’s threats against protesters on 22 February were highlighted as firm evidence of the regime’s culpability and willingness to commit further atrocities (Achcar 2013: 242).

The NTC also participated in framing Qadhafi’s criminality as diabolical in scale, even going beyond official figures and reports. Mahmoud Jibril described it as unprecedented ‘manslaughter and genocide’ in Libya,¹⁵³ and Mustafa Abdul Jalil asserted that by 24 February 2011, 2000 people had been killed in Benghazi, and 5000 people had been killed in Tripoli under Qadhafi’s orders,¹⁵⁴ declaring that ‘Qadhafi is behind all terrorist acts in the world...all that is happening in Libya and outside Libya

¹⁴⁸ @ShababLibya, 16 February 2011. 1.15pm. Tweet.

¹⁴⁹ @ShababLibya. 17 February 2011. 3.07pm. Tweet.

¹⁵⁰ “The killing of a child at the hands of mercenaries in Benghazi”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/ni9Zvs>

¹⁵¹ @ShababLibya. 17 February 2011. 3.11pm. Tweet.

¹⁵² @libyafeb17_com. 20 March 2011. 4.47pm. Tweet.

¹⁵³ “Libyan National Transitional Council, 8 March 2011”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/xWN3PH>

¹⁵⁴ “Interview with Mustafa Abdul Jalil”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/2TTGh6>

is due to Qadhafi's commands'.¹⁵⁵ The Libyan League of Human Rights (LLHR), led by its Secretary General Souleimen Bouchuiguir, addressed the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on February 25, in turn describing the actions of the Qadhafi regime as a 'genocide and a crime against humanity'.¹⁵⁶

The diagnostic framing was in many ways consistent in tone, and supported by an assortment of reliable testimonies, according to LYM. However, and by the retroactive admission of some of those who participated in or witnessed this framing process, there was a substantive embellishment of figures and reports by witnesses on the ground. According to Salem, who was present in Tripoli at the time, the figures were incongruous with the reality on the ground: 'we would hear reports coming out on the basis that Qadhafi killed 30 people, then 250 people...and after that, the figure suddenly rose to 6000'.¹⁵⁷ Hamza, who was based in Benghazi and parsing information to diaspora activists and journalists, states:

I remember I exaggerated a couple of deaths in my tweets...the more vicious it sounded, the more horrific it sounded, the better. We were all thinking, just get out as much as you can, as much as possible. Libyan rumours – three died, but then we heard 13 died, and then it became 30. It had to be done though, because there was no other way... the killing was real, the use of anti-aircraft guns was real.¹⁵⁸

In turn, the NTC member Hussein, and the dissident and journalist Mustafa, noted the tendency to exaggerate the civilian death toll, but justified its occurrence by arguing

¹⁵⁵ "Interview with Mustafa Abdul Jalil". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/a1nk1e>

¹⁵⁶ "LLHR addresses UNHRC". Libyan League for Human Rights. Available at: <https://goo.gl/tJ71TR>

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Salem, former economic analyst and anti-regime demonstrator, 10 December 2016. Birmingham.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Hamza, anti-regime demonstrator and civil society activist, 4 April 2015. London.

that this was a necessary part of the media war against the Qadhafi regime.¹⁵⁹ The British-Libyan activist Yahya argued that even humanitarian organisations in Libya, such as those based in the besieged city of Misrata, amplified the threat against civilian lives in order to hasten the arrival of international aid.¹⁶⁰ Amnesty International later questioned reports of the Qadhafi regime deploying foreign mercenaries, arguing in June 2011 that ‘most were sub-Saharan migrants working in Libya without documents’ (Cockburn 2011). However, the initial, almost apocalyptic narrative of culpability was unanimous in its condemnation and convincing in its reliance on grassroots testimonies.

The second strand of diagnostic framing repeatedly emphasised that Libyans had been ‘governed by Qadhafi with an iron fist for 42 years’.¹⁶¹ This framed Qadhafi’s culpability through a longer-term rhetoric of injustice, casting Libyan history as a seamless period of political oppression. Social media activists, in order to illustrate this claim, evoked historic instances of regime violence such as the 1996 Abu Slim massacre, publishing interviews with victims’ families,¹⁶² and citing the massacre as evidence of Qadhafi’s ‘insanity’ and scant regard for the civilian cost of staying in power.¹⁶³ Activists sought to erode the image of Qadhafi as humorous eccentric, and to demonstrate instead that ‘the citizens of Libya, home to the largest oil reserves in Africa, were reduced to near beggars’.¹⁶⁴ Mahmoud Jibril argued that there was ‘mass deprivation’ of the people in Libya, with unemployment exceeding

¹⁵⁹ Interviews with Hussein, NTC representative, 7 November 2016, London; and Mustafa, exiled human rights campaigner, 4 March 2015. London.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Yahya, activist and NTC coordinator, 19 November 2016. Skype.

¹⁶¹ “Libyan revolutionaries deny allegations of human rights abuses” (*al-thuwwar al-leebiyeen yanfo id-deaat isaat huqoq al-insaan*). *Al-Manarah*. 15 July 2011. Issue 4: 3.

¹⁶² @EnoughGaddafi. “A Short Documentary that tells of the #AbuSalimMassacre “A Mothers Plea for Justice”...#Gaddafi crimes”. 28 June 2011. 11.52am. Tweet.

¹⁶³ Hall, Eleanor. “Libyan Youth Movement says it is Gaddafi who is on drugs”. *ABC News*. 1 March 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/xryvQX>

¹⁶⁴ Daoud, Nahla. “Libyans have suffered enough. Muammar Gaddafi must go”. *The Guardian*. 23 February 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/UPsTBv>

30% despite the presence of mass oil wealth,¹⁶⁵ and pointed out that ‘Libyans have been going to Tunis or Jordan for their healthcare needs’ due to a lack of basic public services.¹⁶⁶

Tareq of LibyaFeb17 argued that the phrase ‘42 years’ was one of the most ubiquitous expressions deployed by Libyans in 2011: ‘the first thing I noticed about conversations when I got there’, jokingly commenting that ‘I quickly became sick of hearing it’.¹⁶⁷ I would argue that this particular expression served to ‘crystallize the essential components of the frame in an easily recalled clip’ (Noakes and Johnston 2005: 8). It acted as a scaffold on which to hang an array of historical grievances and suppressed narratives of political oppression, supplied by Libyans themselves and broadcast by frame disseminators. Libya Al-Ahrar devoted a substantial amount of its programming to exposing the Qadhafi regime’s criminality. Shows such as *In a Libyan Dialect (Bil Leebee)*, hosted by the journalist Mahmoud al-Werfalli in July and August 2011, constructed thematic episodes analysing the ‘42 years in which we experienced nothing by suffering’, from an episode focusing on the loss of Libyan lives in the Chadian-Libyan conflict (1978-1987), to another discussing Qadhafi’s destruction of religious values in Libya.¹⁶⁸

The criminalisation of the Qadhafi regime was a strategic, representational practice that served the Libyan opposition’s political objectives. The combination of ratcheted rhetoric and graphic imagery was designed to mobilise further popular participation in the protests, and to garner the support of the international community

¹⁶⁵ “Mahmoud Jibril’s talk at the brooking institute in Washington”. LibyaFeb17 Archive. Available at: <https://goo.gl/Mp8PXT>

¹⁶⁶ “Today’s interview: Mahmoud Jibril”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/tNBjHR>

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Tareq, social media activist and translator in western Libya, 14 February 2015. Oxford.

¹⁶⁸ “*Bil-Leebee programme: Orchestrated Fear*”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/59Jaes>

for the Libyan revolutionary cause.¹⁶⁹ Jasper and Poulsen (1999: 556) have argued that drastic images are crucial for invoking a ‘moral shock’ that is capable of engaging even uninvolved or disconnected political actors, and Doerr et al (2015: 561-563) have described this as a pragmatic, ‘mediatized aspect of mobilization’. The disseminators of graphic images and videos, such as the Libyan Youth Movement, spoke of the powerful impact of such media in strengthening their own commitment to the revolutionary cause, and in generating a further slew of protests, across Libya, that affirmed solidarity and sacrifice for Benghazi.¹⁷⁰ The activist Yahya described viewing videos by opposition activists as a process of ‘consumption’: one that generated an understanding of the scale of the Qadhafi regime’s atrocities, and triggered a concomitant anger and need to act in relation.¹⁷¹

The Libyan opposition’s framing of an existent (and impending) massacre was also significant for the political delegitimation of the Qadhafi regime by the international community. Indeed, the suspension of Libya from the UNHRC on 1 March 2011, due to the Qadhafi regime’s ‘flagrant human rights violations’, was based on the multiple reports and allegations disseminated by the Libyan opposition movement.¹⁷² The LLHR, which addressed the UNHRC on 25 February 2011 and confirmed that genocide was taking place inside Libya, asserted that its own presence at the assembly was crucial in bringing about the ‘suspension of the Gadhafi regime from the UN Council for Human Rights’.¹⁷³ And yet it is important to note that the humanitarian narratives and political objectives of the Libyan opposition movement were intertwined and mutually reinforcing. Ali Zeidan was both the official

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Hussein, NTC representative, 7 November 2016. London.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Ahmed, UK-based social media activist, 25 February 2015. London.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Yahya, civil society activist and NTC coordinator, 29 November 2016. Skype.

¹⁷² “General Assembly Suspends Libya from Human Rights Council”. *UN Press*. 1 March 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/Bktfa3>

¹⁷³ “The Libyan League of Human Rights addresses the UNHRC”. *Facebook*. Available at: <https://goo.gl/WNu3yP>

spokesman of the LLHR,¹⁷⁴ and subsequently the NTC's Europe envoy from March 2011, playing a key role in convincing the ex-French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, to support the Libyan uprising.¹⁷⁵ Mark Kersten (2016: 125) has argued that the ICC's indictment of Qadhafi on 27 June 2011 for crimes against humanity emerged due to this overwhelming 'morality tale of a "good" opposition opposed to an "evil" regime' communicated by Libyan political figures and activists, but that such decisions also served to reinforce the international credibility of the Libyan opposition.

A further, strategic function of diagnostic framing was that it rhetorically absolved reformists and political figures previously connected to the Qadhafi regime, and categorised them as legitimate Libyan opposition. According to *Al-Manarah*, Qadhafi-era figures should be parsed into two categories: those who participated in killing and financial corruption, and those technocrats who were not practically implicated in Qadhafi's actions, and whose competencies were important for the revolution.¹⁷⁶ During the uprising, NTC members who had defected from the Qadhafi regime would rationalise their political participation within the *Jamahiriyah* with reference to its coercive and symbolic technologies of control, stressing they had functioned 'as if' in relation to its system of domination. Abdul Jalil argued that he took up his position as Justice Minister in order to prevent 'a bloodthirsty person' accepting the position in his stead, stressing that he was not 'internally' committed to the regime: 'I was ambivalent when it came to clapping, or saying '*Jamahiriyah*' and 'The Leader', and even in saluting Muammar al-Qadhafi during public meetings. I held to my principles'.¹⁷⁷ Mahmud Jibril stated that he offered his resignation in 2009, as soon as he realised that 'there was no real desire, either for reform or for change',

¹⁷⁴ "Profile: Ali Zeidan". *CNN*. 10 October 2013. Available at: <https://goo.gl/GtZ5qV>

¹⁷⁵ "Ali Zeidan Elected Libya's New Prime Minister". *BBC News*. 14 October 2012. Available at: <https://goo.gl/pU7eQ3>

¹⁷⁶ *Al-Manarah*. 8 July 2011. Issue 3: 5.

¹⁷⁷ "Interview with Mustafa Abdul Jalil". *Mayadeen* 1 May 2011. Issue 1: 4.

and ‘joined the revolutionaries who have expressed my own will for quite some time’.¹⁷⁸ The NTC’s first defence minister, Abdel Fattah Younes, whose defection on 22 February enabled the East of the country to serve as the rebel safe zone during the military conflict (Mezran and Knecht 2015: 85), claimed that he was assigned to the General People’s Committee for Public Security unwillingly and directly by Qadhafi, had never fired a gun at any Libyan civilian, and refused to attend the General People’s Committee meetings out of principle.¹⁷⁹

The tight restriction of culpability to Qadhafi and his inner circle was also deployed in order to encourage further defections towards the opposition ranks. Abdul Jalil declared in February 2011 that ‘Every action that stems from him is not ascribed to any of his allies, or his people, or tribes supportive of him’, in an explicit attempt to encourage popular mobilisation against the Qadhafi regime.¹⁸⁰ At one point, he even went so far as to exculpate anyone but Qadhafi and his son Khamis from responsibility for the killing of Libyan civilians.¹⁸¹ Shammam addressed Qadhafi’s own tribe, the Qadhadhfa, informing them that they were welcomed by the opposition, who would not ‘take Qadhafi’s crimes as a sign of guilt for this great tribe’.¹⁸² Abdel Fattah Younes described the residents of Qadhafi’s stronghold city of Sirte as ‘Libya’s sons, like you and me, but their bad luck has brought them under Qadhafi’s hand’.¹⁸³

The self-vindicating discourse deployed by the Libyan opposition – in which Qadhafi alone was criminally culpable - was extended more broadly towards the Libyan populace, and resonated palpably with key contradictions within the

¹⁷⁸ “Today’s interview: Mahmoud Jibril”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/tNBjHR>

¹⁷⁹ “Interview with Abdel Fattah Younes”. *Mayadeen*. 1 May 2011. Issue 1: 6.

¹⁸⁰ “Interim Libyan government wins support”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/V3fKZi>

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² “Interview with Mahmud Shammam”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/ckTmZe>

¹⁸³ “The Martyr Abdel Fattah Younes”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/afcN3s>

Jamahiriya's institutional logic. One of the tensions that the revolutionary rhetoric sought to expose was that between the public re-performance of the *Jamahiriya*'s rituals, and the widespread absence of belief in their veracity. By unearthing this contradiction, it strengthened the dichotomous narrative of the uprising. This type of messaging appears, not so much in the concise, targeted framing of social media platforms, but on the television channel Libya al-Ahrar, which addressed the nature of the Qadhafi regime at length. Mahmoud al-Werfalli's show '*Bil Leebee*' evoked Libyans' shared understanding of the way in which the *Jamahiriya* operated in practice:

The regime created a system of orchestrated fear. Even when we grew up, this fear kept growing inside of us. And everyone knows that you can do whatever you want to someone who is scared. For instance, who would have thought that one Libyan would 'notify' on another Libyan, and write 'reports' on him? Qadhafi did this. Qadhafi created so many security instruments, until you didn't know your friend from your enemy...I'm not blaming anyone here. A person who is shackled can't do anything...can't produce, can't create, can't innovate.¹⁸⁴

Despite acknowledging that there was some popular involvement within the *Jamahiriya*'s security apparatus, Werfalli frames the regime as principally culpable for its co-optation of the populace, and presents Libyans as devoid of political agency, and therefore of accountability. He goes on to comment explicitly on the shared condition of unbelief, or acting 'as if', that guided behaviour in the Libyan public sphere: 'You'll go to visit someone, and find him hanging a picture of Qadhafi in his living room. You know he absolutely hates him! But you also know he's just doing it

¹⁸⁴ "Bil-Leebee programme: Orchestrated Fear". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/59Jaes>

because he's scared'.¹⁸⁵ This type of rhetoric closely mirrors the statement by Abdul Jalil in which he insisted that he abided by his own principles despite occupying a formal political position in the *Jamahiriya*. Such rhetoric, whether self-referential by NTC members or directed at Libyans in general, absolved Libyans of political responsibility by signalling that they did not believe in, and were not morally committed to, the Qadhafi regime's symbolism.

The opposition's diagnostic framing also publically exposed and refuted the *Jamahiriya*'s incongruous attribution of formal political authority to the Libyan people. The shift in the Benghazi lawyers' rhetoric (from reform to revolution) signals a break away from the regime's long-honoured terms of debate, in which 'state institutions', purportedly run by the people, were portrayed as the panacea to Libya's problems. According to the Benghazi lawyer Salwa al-Deghali, they initially abided by a rhetoric of reform from 15 to 17 February because their 'ceiling of expectations was so low' due to their previous dealings with the regime, that even a call for a constitution was a radical demand.¹⁸⁶ More generally, it has been argued that the first week of protests across the country saw the Libyan 'problem' be redefined from socioeconomic issues, such as the shortage of housing and limited social services, to a call for regime change (St. John 2013: 93). The lawyer Bashir Sefaw, who protested in the western city of Zawiya, described the 'shocking moment' in which chants shifted being about corruption to 'the people demand the fall of the regime'.¹⁸⁷ Very rapidly, the condensed expression 'he ruled us for 42 years' came to expose Qadhafi's pretence at abdicating political authority in a way that the *Jamahiriya*'s tolerated political dissent could not. As argued by Scott (1990: 51) it is 'only when

¹⁸⁵ "Bil-Leebee programme: Orchestrated Fear". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/59Jaes>

¹⁸⁶ al-Deghali, Salwa. "When the bloodshed began, we called for an end to the regime" (*heyne sal al-dam asbaha al-matlab isqat al-nitham*). *Mayadeen*. 1 May 2011. Issue 1: 16.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Khaled, pro-opposition lawyer in Zawiya, 26 March 2015. Tunisia.

contradictions are publicly declared do they have to publicly accounted for', attaining a new rhetorical significance and practical import in the process.

6.3.2 Prognostic Framing

In collective episodes of contention, the function of prognostic framing is to 'present a solution to the problem suggested in the diagnosis' (Noakes and Johnston 2005: 5). In the following, I outline the way in which the Libyan uprising contained both short-term and long-term prognostic vocabularies: the former centred on the 'liberation of Libya' from Qadhafi,¹⁸⁸ and the need for military intervention in order to realise this prognosis, while the latter advocated the notion of 'democracy' – at times loosely-defined, at others imbued with specificity - as solution. The notion that prognosis commonly follows diagnosis in social movements (Benford and Snow 2000: 616) has been questioned in the case of the Arab uprisings, with the common argument that positive messages of what the populace was 'rebellious *for*' did not materialise in the popular opposition's rhetoric (Pack 2013b: 1 – author's emphasis), or were difficult to sustain when they did (Alterman 2011: 113). However, I would argue that there was a complexity to the opposition's prognostic framing; for instance, in the rhetorical insistence on the compatibility of military intervention with popular revolt, and in the opposition's differentiated framings of 'democracy', depending on its recipient audience.

In some respects, it borders on truism to assert that the prognosis of the Libyan uprising was the removal of Qadhafi. Chants of 'the people demand the fall of the regime' (at times altered to 'the fall of the Colonel'), and a range of slogans

¹⁸⁸ "Interview with Ali al-Issawi" (*muqabala ma'aa Ali al-Issawi*). *Al-Manarah*. 8 July 2011. Issue 3: 5.

instructing Qadhafi to ‘leave Libya’, ‘go to Jeddah’, or stating that it was ‘his turn’ to fall, following Mubarak and Ben Ali, were a central feature of demonstrations throughout the entire period of conflict.¹⁸⁹ In turn, and from its formation, the NTC dismissed the prospect of negotiating with the Qadhafi regime,¹⁹⁰ stating that its objective was to ‘plan and work towards liberating the remaining cities still kidnapped by the tyrant Mu’ammar Gaddafi and his gang’.¹⁹¹ NTC members continued to affirm, periodically, their rejection of a political settlement with the regime. In April 2011, the Council spokesman, Abdul Hafiz Ghoga, asserted that ‘we will not accept Gadhafi or any of his sons or aides ruling us ever again for even one hour. This is impossible. We will never accept that. We said it clearly. We will not accept any compromise, any negotiation, any solution with the current regime’.¹⁹²

Beyond this direct, overarching prognosis, the Libyan opposition also advocated for a series of short-term solutions to the escalating conflict with the regime. Most prominently, the portrayal of Qadhafi as the embodiment of ‘evil’ due to his brutal suppression of protests (Kersten 2016: 125) was accompanied by the opposition’s sustained advocacy for the imposition of a no-fly zone over Libyan soil to prevent the aerial bombings of civilians. This soon culminated in the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1973, which authorised a no-fly zone on 17 March 2011, and was followed by the onset of NATO airstrikes against Libyan government forces on 19 March.

¹⁸⁹ Such chants were echoed across different cities in Libya from the onset of protests: see footage of demonstrations in the city of Beida (<https://goo.gl/Q5kXoM>), Benghazi (<https://goo.gl/EgH3dP>), Zintan (<https://goo.gl/FtmJVz>), and Tripoli (<https://goo.gl/mo8qVB>).

¹⁹⁰ “Libyan rebels form Council, reject Gaddafi talks”. *Reuters*. 27 February 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/9mc5bG>

¹⁹¹ “Introducing the Council”. The Interim Transitional National Council. Available at: <https://goo.gl/zyzERX>

¹⁹² “Compromise with Gaddafi not an option, Libyan opposition deputy says”. *CNN*. 6 April 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/S91cXQ>

LYM began to call for a no-fly zone from 25 February 2011, while distinguishing between the military protection of Libyan civilians and the presence of ‘boots on the ground’.¹⁹³ A no-fly zone was of paramount military importance, but ‘foreign intervention’ would ‘turn Libya into a Somalia or Iraq’.¹⁹⁴ This framing exploited the ambiguity over what constitutes military force in a specific conflict. Ahmed conceded that this was a ‘sensitive issue...Libyans are completely against foreign intervention in terms of military aid’,¹⁹⁵ using the term ‘military aid’ to refer to the deployment of foreign troops inside Libya. Ahmed Sawalem of LYM argued in an interview that ‘What we don’t want is for Libya to become like Iraq...we don’t want foreign intervention after this regime collapses’, but that a no-fly zone was nonetheless crucial in preventing foreign mercenaries from entering the country.¹⁹⁶ Similarly, LibyaFeb17 affirmed that the aim of the no-fly zone would be ‘to PROTECT the people and NOT to conduct any unnecessary military actions in Libya’.¹⁹⁷

The implicit assumption in this framing is that a no-fly zone does not comprise ‘military aid’ or ‘foreign intervention’. In fact, although policymakers have previously viewed no-fly zones as closing the gap between sanctions and military force, no-fly zones do involve the direct application of military force through the preventative destruction of equipment and forces (Meibauer 2016). Nevertheless, the attraction of a no-fly zone in 2011, for the Libyan opposition, was in the way in which it preserved the political agency of the Libyan opposition while distinguishing between foreign intervention and the minimal protection of civilians: a distinction that would

¹⁹³ @ShababLibya. 25 February 2011. Tweet. 4.39pm

¹⁹⁴ @ShababLibya. 28 February 2011. 5.47am. Tweet.

¹⁹⁵ “Omar Amer interview with ABC News, 28 February 2011”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/c72n9T>

¹⁹⁶ Hall, Eleanor. “Libyan Youth Movement says it is Gaddafi who is on drugs”. *ABC News*. 1 March 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/xryvQX>

¹⁹⁷ @libyafeb17_com. 12 March 2011. 9.48am. Tweet.

ultimately be undermined as a very result of the Libyan uprising (ibid). The NTC, which began to undertake talks with the international community in March 2011, also emphasised this distinction in their simultaneous demand for a no-fly zone and insistence that it would amplify, rather than diminish, the popular will of the Libyan people. Mustafa Abdul Jalil argued that a refusal to implement a no-fly zone would lead to ‘catastrophe in Libya’,¹⁹⁸ and that it would be ‘restricted’ in scope, only entailing ‘the lifting of the siege on Libya’s cities...so that people can continue to express their desire for freedom’.¹⁹⁹

It has been argued that the primary role of armed violence and external intervention in the collapse of the Qadhafi regime distinguishes the Libyan uprising from the popular democratic revolts that took place in Egypt and Tunisia (Strakes 2016: 154). Although it has been noted that foreign states such as France and Qatar did not actually initiate the uprising (Khalil 2014: 119), Chalcraft (2016: 4) draws a dichotomy between popular emancipation and foreign intervention, citing the NATO military intervention as a complicating factor in the uprising’s narrative of progress and liberation. However, the acceptance – even active embrace – of this contradiction underpinned the Libyan opposition’s justification of foreign intervention in the country. The no-fly zone was framed as the expression of national, popular sovereignty. LYM cited eyewitness statements from Tripoli which claimed that a no-fly zone was needed in order to ‘level the playing field’, asserting that it was not they, but Libyans inside the country who ‘demand a no-fly zone over Libya now!’²⁰⁰ It posted video footage showing the support for a no-fly zone inside both regime-

¹⁹⁸ “AP Interview: Libyan Rebels Plead for a No-Fly Zone”. *Washington Post*. 12 March 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/tL6cTV>

¹⁹⁹ “Speech by Mustafa Abdul Jalil”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/XchqtJ>

²⁰⁰ @ShababLibya. 25 February 2011. 8.43pm. Tweet.

controlled cities such as Tripoli,²⁰¹ and opposition-controlled territories alike: ‘Protests continue in Benghazi, asking NATO to do more for Western Libya #Libya #Feb17 as many more civilians die at the hands of Gaddafi’.²⁰²

Other activists who participated in calling for the no-fly zone, such as the Libyan journalist and photographer Dania, argued that ‘we were campaigning for it because the Libyans it...we weren’t there, so we had to amplify what the people on the ground wanted’.²⁰³ In response to criticisms of the no-fly zone, particularly by the Arab journalist Abdel Bari Atwan, the activist Tasbeeh Herwees tweeted that ‘Libyans in #Libya want a no-fly zone and that’s all that matters’.²⁰⁴ Benghazi-based activists such as Layal concurred with this assessment, arguing that support for the no-fly zone was unanimous throughout the city, fuelled by fears of further regime violence.²⁰⁵ The Tripoli-based activist Reem also described a celebratory atmosphere among close friends and family, following the announcement of the no-fly zone.²⁰⁶ While affirming their support for a no-fly zone in Libya, activists refuted Saif al-Islam Qadhafi’s description of the opposition as ‘NATO revolutionaries’ who had reintroduced colonialism into the country, asserting that it was Qadhafi himself who had ‘brought mercenaries (invasion) and the war to us’.²⁰⁷ The *Jamahiriya*’s anti-imperialist rhetoric was redirected at the Qadhafi regime in the argument that Qadhafi himself, by massacring his own people, had become a foreign aggressor.²⁰⁸

Following the imposition of the no-fly zone, Libyan activists and members of the opposition continued to support NATO’s military mission in Libya by asserting

²⁰¹ @ShababLibya. 23 May 2011. 7.39pm. Tweet.

²⁰² @ShababLibya. 4 April 2011. 9.59am. Tweet.

²⁰³ Interview with Dania, Benghazi-based journalist and campaigner, 27 August 2015. London.

²⁰⁴ @Therwees. 17 March 2011. 9.37pm. Tweet.

²⁰⁵ Interview with Marwa, civil society activist in Benghazi, 23 January 2016. London.

²⁰⁶ Interview with Reem, women’s rights activist in Tripoli, 15 March 2015. Skype.

²⁰⁷ @ShababLibya. 19 March 2011. 10.43am. Tweet.

²⁰⁸ “Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi: how far is Qadhafi from Islam?” YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/9TZwkf>

the primacy of the grassroots armed struggle on the ground. LYM portrayed the NATO mission as a merely supporting act: ‘Calling on NATO to help Libyans in #Nafusa mountains to free the region from G forces and allow desperately needed aid to reach them’.²⁰⁹ The NTC’s first defence minister, Abdel Fattah Younes represented the collaboration as a tactical one that ultimately affirmed Libyan agency: ‘There is of course coordination between us and NATO, but the decisions of the battlefield are solely down to the chief of staff, not to NATO or anyone else’.²¹⁰ Layal described the no-fly zone as a necessity, and not an event to be valorised: ‘I remember refusing to carry any Western flags during protests...at the end of the day it wasn’t their revolution, it was the Libyan revolution’.²¹¹ The activist and doctor Mounir, who travelled to the east of Libya in April 2011, argued that Libyans were aware of, and accepted, any potential political repercussions from the intervention: ‘of course we know that other countries have their interests...but we would have allied with the devil at the time, if it meant getting rid of Qadhafi’.²¹² In this way, the diagnostic framing of military intervention was underpinned by references to the agency of Libyans themselves: as the principal decision-makers behind the no-fly zone, and as the key players in the NATO-Libyan military relationship.

In addition to the short-term prognosis of liberation from Qadhafi, there was a longer-term prognostic rhetoric that was democracy-centric, identifying the solution to Libya’s ‘42 years’ of oppression as residing in democracy and in the latent potential of the democratically inclined, modern youth who had ushered in the protests. This rhetoric was most pronounced when it was addressed towards the international community and foreign media outlets. In an interview with the German

²⁰⁹ @ShababLibya. 16 May 2011. 6.06pm. Tweet.

²¹⁰ “The Martyr Abdul Fattah Younes”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/afcN3s>

²¹¹ Interview with Layal Husni, 23 January 2016. London.

²¹² Interview with Hisham, pro-opposition medical doctor, 5 December 2016. Skype.

broadcaster *Duetsche Welle*, Mahmoud Jibril described this as a shared aspiration in the country:

All Libyans want to build a free, democratic country that respects human rights, participates positively and constructively in international relations and contributes to the security, stability and interests of other Mediterranean countries. This is what the simple Libyan man on the street wants...he will use this vocabulary with complete freedom and frankness, even if he is not fully aware of what it actually means.²¹³

Jibril further argued, in May 2011, that ‘freedom of expression’ and ‘participatory democracy’ had been central tenets of Libyan protesters’ demands from the outset.²¹⁴ Similarly, social media activists also depicted democracy as a widely embraced, popular prognosis. LibyaFeb17 asserted that ‘Arabs are democracy’s new pioneers’,²¹⁵ while LYM argued that the ‘Libyan struggle for democracy’ was already leading to an increased prominence and role for women in Libyan political life,²¹⁶ imbuing this struggle with a progressive slant. In August 2011, a speaker on behalf of the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya argued that ‘I do not think we will disagree in future, because everyone is agreed on democracy, on the separation of powers and a constitution, and on the importance of civil society’.²¹⁷

This pro-democracy prognostic framing was to become an integral part of the NTC’s roadmap to democracy that was unveiled in May 2011, and that would culminate in the Temporary Constitutional Declaration (TCD) that was issued in

²¹³ “Jibril: ‘We respect Germany’s support of the revolution, and there will be no negotiations that don’t involve the departure of Qadhafi’”. *DW Arabic*. Available at: <https://goo.gl/j2S4qT>

²¹⁴ “Mahmoud Jibril’s talk at the brooking institute in Washington”. LibyaFeb17 Archive. Available at: <https://goo.gl/Mp8PXT>

²¹⁵ @LibyaFeb17_com. 25 February 2011. 7.58am. Tweet.

²¹⁶ @ShababLibya 21 March 2011. 4.21am. Tweet.

²¹⁷ “Interview with Adam Irgeeg” (*muqabala ma’aa Adam Irgeeg*). *Mayadeen*. 22 May 2011. Issue 3: 19.

August 2011, towards the end of the conflict. Prior to this, the framing was aimed at persuading international policymakers that the Libyan uprising was congenial to their interests. One NTC member described the success of the uprising as hinging on this rhetorical diplomacy: they were responsible for tailoring their message to different audiences, distinguishing between their addresses to tribal leaders and those to western diplomats and politicians in a bid to establish a wide revolutionary consensus.²¹⁸ The NTC's foreign affairs minister, Ali al-Issawi, affirmed that the uprising was successful precisely because of this messaging: 'we proved to the world that we are a people who want freedom, and who want democracy, and who want a ruler to come via ballot boxes and not via tanks'.²¹⁹

In framing democracy as a collective revolutionary objective, the Libyan opposition demarcated correspondingly democratic and progressive identities for the revolutionaries. *Al-Manarah* newspaper argued that Libyan protesters and fighters were 'defenders of human rights in Libya',²²⁰ and Jibril stridently denied allegations made by Human Rights Watch of war violations conducted by revolutionaries, only conceding that 'some incidents' took place in the first two weeks of protests (BBC 2011). LYM tweeted on more than one occasion that 'We would urge the media not to refer to the protesters as rebels, but as the pro democracy or simply Libyan people'.²²¹ The NTC even underscored that democracy would be brought to fruition by a generation of young, Libyan activists who were modern in outlook, and shared in the liberal, secular values of the West. In an interview in March 2011, Mahmud Shammam made reference to the vitality of the second and third generations of

²¹⁸ Interview with Hussein, NTC representative, 7 November 2016. London.

²¹⁹ "Interview with Ali al-Issawi" (*muqabala ma 'aa Ali al-Issawi*). *Al-Manarah*. 22 July 2011. Issue 5: 4.

²²⁰ "Libyan revolutionaries deny allegations of human rights abuses" (*al-thuwwar al-leebiyeen yanfo id-deaat isaat huqoq al-insaan*). *Al-Manarah*. 15 July 2011. Issue 4: 3.

²²¹ @ShababLibya 27 February 2011. 5.04am. Tweet.

Libyans who had mobilised for the uprising, and who were ‘raised in your living rooms and in your universities and in your institutions’.²²² Mahmoud Jibril, in an address to the European Parliament on 8 March 2011, argued that the pro-democracy Libyan protesters embodied ‘our shared humanity’, and described the NTC as engendering principles of equality by being formed ‘without discrimination, based on gender, religion, or ethnicity’.²²³ In his speech, Jibril situated this endorsement of Libya’s revolutionaries within the broader context of the Arab Spring, which, he argued, was an indication of the democratic inclinations of all Arab youth.

To some extent, there was a concerted effort by the Libyan opposition to ensure that these representations of Libyan revolutionaries were reflected on the ground. Elham Saudi, the director of Lawyers for Justice in Libya, described the organisation’s dissemination of rules of conflict to anti-regime combatants in Libya as particularly successful, arguing that there was a ‘genuine desire to not commit any atrocities’.²²⁴ Yet, contrary to Jibril’s assertions, the pro-democracy frame was only loosely articulated in the initial weeks of protest. It was present in the pro-revolutionary statement by the lawyer-led 17 February Coalition in Benghazi, but the actual term ‘democracy’ did not feature in the early protests and demonstrations. The activist and fighter Fawzi argues that the two most prominent chants of the uprising avoided this type of specificity, instead deploying very general or affective rhetoric: ‘the people demand the fall of the regime’ and ‘with our blood and souls, we will sacrifice for Benghazi’.²²⁵ The tribal declarations (‘bayans’) issued in support of the uprising between February and March 2011 principally mentioned ‘freedom’ and

²²² “Interview with Mahmud Shamam, 9 March 2011”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/u4uCdP>.

²²³ “Libyan National Transitional Council, 8 March 2011”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/xWN3PH>

²²⁴ Interview with Bushra, Libyan lawyer, 4 March 2015. London.

²²⁵ Interview with Fawzi, revolutionary fighter in western Libya, 29 December 2015. Skype.

‘equality’ as aspirational values; where ‘democracy’ was evoked, it functioned as an empty signifier, deployed interchangeably with a myriad of other values such as ‘freedom and justice’.²²⁶

In addition, and in place of or alongside ‘democracy’, prognostic framings often mentioned ‘a country of institutions’: a term that makes reference to the disorderly operation of Libya’s administrative-bureaucratic system.²²⁷ Noting the ubiquity of these terms, Ali, who was based in Tripoli during the uprising, argued that, as the uprising progressed, ‘people did say they wanted democracy, but you’d have had to ask every single person what their idea of democracy and freedom was, because it was obvious that everyone had a different understanding of what those words meant’.²²⁸

Although in some ways, the success of the Libyan uprising hinged on what can be described as a ‘negative’ (Alterman 2011) prognosis – the toppling of the Qadhafi regime – the rhetoric surrounding this objective was more complex in its content. As argued by the NTC’s foreign minister, Ali al-Issawi, removing Qadhafi was the ‘starting point’ in a longer list of demands, including ‘freedom, democracy, and the right to choose who rules us’.²²⁹ Terms such as ‘freedom’, ‘liberty’ and ‘justice’ were sufficiently resonant to have elicited a wide range of support. In early appeals for mobilisation, which were disseminated in opposition websites, Qadhafi’s own words were used against him: ‘Qadhafi has always said in his speeches that we are a nation who decides its fate by itself, and so here we have decided to go down to the streets

²²⁶ See the tribal declarations in support of the uprising by the Jaafra and Rejban tribes. Available at: <https://goo.gl/Euv2m2> and <https://goo.gl/eTQKU> respectively.

²²⁷ “Interview with Adam Irgeeg” (*muqabala ma’aa Adam Irgeeg*). *Mayadeen*. 22 May 2011. Issue 3: 19.

²²⁸ Interview with Ali, rebel coordinator and fighter in Tripoli, 9 February 2015. Skype.

²²⁹ “Ali al-Issawi, minister for foreign affairs”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/wbvJod>

and express our destiny in our own way'.²³⁰ However, the Libyan opposition's prognostic framing went further, strategically redefining the protests as stemming from a collective democratic will and lending them a coherence and complexity that they had initially lacked. Framing the necessity of foreign military intervention also involved carefully balancing and furthering both the uprising's popular legitimacy and its instrumental political objectives.

6.3.3 Motivational Framing

The final component of collective action framing involves the generation of 'vocabularies of motive', which 'give people a reason to join collective action' (Noakes and Johnston 2005: 56), and serve as a 'prod to action' (Snow and Benford 1988: 202) where diagnostic and prognostic vocabularies may be insufficient. The Libyan uprising generated collectivist and religious vocabularies of motive that functioned as a dichotomous counter-narrative to the Qadhafi regime's framing of the uprising as separatist and irreligious in nature. Such vocabularies explicitly sought to mobilise the Libyan populace against the Qadhafi regime, both in protest and in military struggle.

On 22 February, Qadhafi delivered a speech in which he warned of tribal and regional disintegration if demonstrations did not cease: a speech that generated a sequence of angry protests affirming the contrary (Sawani 2013: 61). Collectivist motivational frames stressed the existent national unity of the 'Libyan people' and of 'Libyan soil' as a motivator to action, but also represented unity as a necessary means to overthrowing the Qadhafi regime. The NTC's foreign minister Ali al-Issawi argued

²³⁰ "Statement regarding the Day of Rage in Libya". Al-Satur. 31 January 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/Y2ybFX>

that mobilising in a unified manner was a way of defying the regime's propaganda and attempts at generating 'inter-Libyan' conflict.²³¹

In the opposition's rhetoric, unity was framed in two distinctive, arguably contradictory, ways. Firstly, political figures and activists frequently addressed their rhetorical appeals for revolutionary participation along tribal lines, to which tribal figures and representatives responded by speaking on behalf of their constituencies in support of the protests (Lacher 2013b: 151). This deliberately sought to offset the Qadhafi regime's deployment of financial incentives and organisation of conferences in a bid to mobilise tribal support (Boudreaux 2011). The NTC's media minister Mahmud Shammam actively addressed the loyalist Qadhadhfa tribe in a bid to encourage their defection. He reminded them of Qadhafi's treacherous killing of his cousin, Hassan Shkal, and referenced historical networks of tribal allegiance that now mandated loyalty to the uprising: 'When you sought refuge in the past, the people of Qadhafi, where did you go? You went to Sabha with Saif Al-Nasr...who announced not long ago that he is with the uprising'.²³² In the same address, Shammam even mentioned his own tribe, the Magharba, as a way of asserting his own affinity to the Qadhadhfa tribe.

In strategic terms, it has been argued that 'tribal loyalties helped ensure that the entire north-east and much of Jabul Nafusa sided with the revolution', through the rise of the Zintan and Rajban, two large Arab tribes, alongside predominantly Berber towns (Lacher 2013b: 156). Moreover, the NTC's encouragement of tribal rhetoric allowed it to consolidate its legitimacy and to discredit Qadhafi's claim to enjoy overwhelming tribal support (Sawani 2013: 61). However, collectivist framings in the

²³¹ "al-Issawi explains the opinion of the revolutionaries on the current situation". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/fhmEVB>

²³² "The activist Mahmud Shammam comments on Qadhafi's speech". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/7ErKNJ>

uprising also involved the tactical underplaying of the role of tribalism inside Libya. In an early interview with Al-Jazeera, the NTC's Mahmoud Jibril insisted that 'we do not recognise the tribe as a political body...the discourse of the tribe as a security and political device is a backward discourse that was used by the regime from 1975'.²³³ The activist Alaa al-Ameri argued, in a post that was subsequently re-tweeted by LibyaFeb17, that the notion of 'tribal Libya' was a myth': 'by labeling us as "tribal", you effectively dismiss the notion that our uprising has anything to do with freedom, democracy or human dignity'.²³⁴ In turn, LYM declared that in Libya, there was 'no tribal rivalry, every revolutionary in Libya is fighting for the same cause, flag and country'.²³⁵

As with the Libyan opposition's framing of 'democracy', unity served as a flexible marker, at times built on the salience of regional and tribal identities, and at others premised on stressing their insignificance. This rhetorical disavowal of tribalism, accompanied by the practical instrumentalisation of tribal allegiances, arguably resonated with existent political dynamics in the *Jamahiriya*. Qadhafi had also argued that tribalism was harmful to national unity, while exploiting tribal allegiances in order to consolidate his own power base (Joff  2013: 27-30). The controversial killing of Abdul Fattah Younes on 28 July 2011, under the summons of an investigation by the NTC's executive committee, threatened to bring this contradiction to the fore, particularly when Libyan media outlets such as *Al-Manarah* began to engage in speculation that latent tribal divisions had motivated the killing.²³⁶ However, the NTC continued to deny the presence of tribal motivations in order to a

²³³ "Today's interview: Mahmoud Jibril". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/tNBjHR>

²³⁴ al-Ameri, Alaa. "The Myth of Tribal Libya". *The Guardian*. 30 March 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/re4YYm>. Retweeted @libyafeb17_com. 4 April 2011. 4.39am.

²³⁵ @ShababLibya. 16 March 2011. 4.45pm. Tweet.

²³⁶ Issues 7 and 8 of *Al-Manarah* (5 August and 12 August 2011) devoted multiple pages to debate on this issue.

bid to preserve the unity of the opposition (Pack 2013b: 7), with Libya Al-Ahrar's presenter, journalist Mahmoud al-Werfalli, arguing that the killing may well have been part of a Qadhafi-led conspiracy to divide the revolutionary ranks.²³⁷ Social media activists also rallied against the repeated use of the phrase 'tribalism' by journalists without a context in which Qadhafi himself was once again culpable for engendering tribal division,²³⁸ affirming the argument by Mohammed Bamyeh (2011b) that the word 'tribal' in Libya is less a descriptor of an empirical reality than a reflection of the regime's 'retrograde organizational apparatus'.

Another potent motivational vocabulary that emerged during the uprising involved statements of Islamic religious obligations (*fatawa*) issued by Muslim clerics and endorsed by the Libyan opposition. These characterised the military conflict against the Qadhafi regime as a form of struggle (*jihad*) that was incumbent (*fard ayn*) upon all Libyans. Sheikh Sadeq al-Ghariani, a prominent religious leader who was later appointed head of the NTC's Supreme Fatwa Council, declared on 20 February that protesting against Qadhafi, and deploying 'self-defence' to that end, was obligatory for the Libyan people 'according to sharia...whoever neglects this has erred'.²³⁹ A corresponding *fatwa* was issued by the Egyptian cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi, immediately following the arrest of Ghariani, characterising the uprising as a 'blessed intifada', describing rebellion against the Qadhafi regime as 'a sharia obligation and an Islamic obligation upon everyone', and one that would bring about a return to Libya's 'true Arab and Islamic nature'.²⁴⁰ Social media activists immediately endorsed the fatwas issued by Ghariani and Qaradawi. On 21 February, LYM

²³⁷ "Bil-Leebee programme: Killings and Assassinations". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/qmy2P6>

²³⁸ @EnoughGaddafi. 23 March 2011. 7.33am. Tweet.

²³⁹ "Statement by Sadeq al-Ghariani on Al-Jazeera". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/12GNed>

²⁴⁰ "The arrest of the cleric Sadeq al-Ghariani and Qaradawi's message". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/8v6RkX>

tweeted: ‘Qaradawi asks any soldier or libyan who can kill gaddafi should do (issued a fatwa) we need an end to this and quickly’.²⁴¹ LibyaFeb17 translated a text of Sadeq al-Ghariani’s speech in which he called for *jihad* against Qadhafi, placing it on their own website and sending it to LYM for the latter to broadcast to its more extensive network of Twitter contacts.²⁴²

Over the course of the Libyan conflict, the *fatawa* issued against the Qadhafi regime by Ghariani shifted from sanctioning protest, to mandating the taking up of arms, while also endorsing the NTC’s sovereign authority over the Libyan people. Using the religious rhetoric of ‘oaths of allegiance’ (*‘bay’a’*), which, as noted in the previous chapter, had been deployed by the Qadhafi regime in upholding its own claims to legitimacy, Ghariani presented a *fatwa* in August 2011 declaring the following:

All Libyans, at this current moment, must accept the authority of the National Transitional Council, under the leadership of Mustafa Abdul Jalil. Everyone must give *bay’a* to the NTC. The NTC is currently the legal guardian of Muslims of this country, and so it is incumbent on people to give *bay’a* to it...The NTC does not want to stay in power, but will hand over its authority following the holding of democratic elections. At that point, people can choose who governs them, but in this current climate, it is impermissible for us to disagree on this, in any shape or form.²⁴³

Meanwhile, the figureheads and proponents of secular democracy in the country, such as the NTC’s media minister Mahmud Shammam, both affirmed and supplied a platform for Ghariani’s Islamic legal opinions. The religious television programme

²⁴¹ @ShababLibya. 21 February 2011. 1.07pm.

²⁴² @ShababLibya. 20 February 2011. 2.01pm.

²⁴³ “Fatwa by Sadeq al-Ghariani on the necessity of giving bay’aa to the NTC”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/1z5qBh>

Issues and Rulings (Qadaya wa Fatawa) was aired on Libya al-Ahrar during July and August 2011, and gave a prominent role to Ghariani as the authoritative Islamic voice of the uprising. On this programme, Ghariani continued to urge Libyans, including those residing in the diaspora, to participate in the military overthrow of the Qadhafi regime, describing this as an act of ‘supporting God, and supporting truth, and supporting justice...and establishing God’s doctrine on earth’.²⁴⁴

The Libyan opposition’s *fatawa* were premised on the effective excommunication (*takfir*) of Qadhafi. Ghariani argued that Qadhafi had directly relinquished his religious and political authority over the Libyan people, both as a result of ‘42 years’ of nefarious attacks on Islamic orthodoxy, and because his suppression of protests revealed that he could not be depended upon for the good governance of his subjects. As a result, he could no longer be termed a ‘legal guardian’ (*wali*), over whom rebellion is normally impermissible.²⁴⁵ This rhetoric resonates with, and shares in, the Qadhafi regime’s own conceptual system. Anti-Qadhafi *fatawa* delegitimised the regime’s own religious scholars (*ulema*), who themselves had issued *fatawa* on the impermissibility of protest against Qadhafi. During the conflict, Qadhafi encouraged local Salafi leaders, especially in Tripoli, to give speeches in mosques against the on-going rebellion; some, such as Abu Hudaifa, denounced the rebels for ‘causing *fitna* and for opening the country to Western invasion’ (Benotman, Pack, and Brandon 2013: 220). The pro-opposition cleric Sheikh Muhammad al-Dokali, in an appearance on Libya Al-Ahrar, responded by describing pro-Qadhafi religious clerics as ‘preachers on the gates of hell,’ and argued that ‘even listening to them is Islamically forbidden’.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ “Issues and Rulings, 20 August”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/JoUhM1>

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ “Libya Al-Ahrar: Sheikh al-Dokali’s intervention on Skype”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/dbs84D>

The *fatawa* mandating jihad against the Qadhafi regime lent the entire conflict a strong, religious undertone. The NTC coordinator Yahya argued that the excommunication of Qadhafi by religious clerics was a critical development in the uprising:

They directly called for *jihad*, and this encouraged many people to come out. I travelled to the south of Libya, to Misrata, and to the Jabal [mountains] area. The fight was always about *jihad* and martyrdom...but the *jihadi* narrative was also convenient for the objectives of the revolution, hence why it was embraced by non-Islamists.²⁴⁷

This religious undertone was reflected in the motivational vocabulary deployed by the opposition's military leaders on the battlefield. In the east of Libya, the defence minister Abdul Fattah Younes declared to his fighters that the conflict against Qadhafi's forces was a 'battle of martyrdom' against unbelievers'.²⁴⁸ In the west of Libya, the commander Abu Bakr al-Rabuub, whose battalion was affiliated with the Tripoli Brigade, described the assault on Qadhafi's Azizyah compound as part of a 'godly revolution, a blessed revolution...we don't want any violations of *sharia* during fighting. Our goal is *jihad*, and to topple the biggest tyrant the world has ever seen'.²⁴⁹ Rabuub, like Ghariani, frames the entire military mission in religious terms, from the motivations underpinning the combat to the protocols of warfare and post-conflict demobilisation, such as the necessity of gathering up and returning weapons to the NTC as a trust to God.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ Interview with Yahya, activist and NTC coordinator, 29 November 2016. Skype.

²⁴⁸ "The Martyr Abdul Fattah Younes". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/afcN3s>

²⁴⁹ "The leader of Al-Sad battalion gives advice to his fighters before the attack on Aziziya". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/WvQ7zA>

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

While deploying religious rhetoric in their internal motivational framing, the Libyan opposition consistently denied the Qadhafi regime's argument that extreme jihadists were the central actors in the uprising. Initially, this denial was on the basis that the anti-regime protests were not Islamist in their composition or in their demands.²⁵¹ The 'Declaration of the Success of the Revolution', issued by a cohort of anti-regime lawyers and activists in Benghazi on 22 February, denied the presence of al-Qaeda in Libya by asserting that this was a 'civil revolution' from the outset, peaceful in its advocacy for the rights and freedoms of all Libyans.²⁵² In turn, and prior to the militarisation of the conflict, LYM also attacked Qadhafi's baseless 'al-Qaeda lies',²⁵³ arguing that 'there is no such thing as al-Qaeda in Libya'.²⁵⁴ As the conflict continued, and the Western media began to propound the notion of a unified Islamist movement hijacking the popular uprisings (Benotman, Pack and Brandon 2013: 192), Mahmoud Jibril conceded that 'there may be Islamist currents...but they do not represent the prevailing view in Libya'.²⁵⁵

One of the most striking characteristics of collective action framing in the Libyan uprising is the way in which it was affirmed across the different sites of messaging outlined at the outset of this chapter. Religious motivational frames were issued by Libyan clerics and endorsed by representatives from the political opposition; the prognosis of international military intervention was propounded by the political opposition and social media activists, and subsequently legitimated by religious

²⁵¹ Hall, Eleanor. "Libyan Youth Movement says it is Gaddafi who is on drugs". *ABC News*. 1 March 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/xryvQX>

²⁵² al-Mismari, Abdelsalam. "The goodness of Libyans was the main factor in the success of the revolution" (*inbiath al-fadail dakhil al-Leebiyeen amil najah al-thawra*). *Mayadeen*. 22 May 2011. Issue 3: 6.

²⁵³ @ShababLibya, 2 March 2011, 4.39am. Tweet.

²⁵⁴ @ShababLibya, 22 March 2011. 4.38pm. Tweet.

²⁵⁵ "Jibril: 'We respect Germany's support of the revolution, and there will be no negotiations that don't involve the departure of Qadhafi'. *DW Arabic*. Available at: <https://goo.gl/j2S4qT>

figures. The sequential framing of Qadhafi as problem, regime overthrow as solution, and religious collectivity as motivation was actively articulated by the opposition, and ‘resonated’ with the *Jamahiriya*’s institutional logic in different ways.

Such framings partly sought to expose the contradictions inherent within the *Jamahiriya*’s system of meaning and practice, especially in the reattribution of political culpability to Qadhafi. However, prognostic and motivational framings also rechanneled some of the regime’s rhetorical content – its vocabularies of freedom and anti-imperialism, tribalism and religious authenticity – for revolutionary ends. As argued by Vandewalle (2012b: 192), ‘some of what Qadhafi once stood for – his suspicions of the West, his wish to renew Arab grandeur, his initial quest for dignity and self-determination’ resonated within the Libyan political imagination in 2011. The opposition’s frames also responded to and corroborated the rhetoric surrounding the ‘Arab Spring’ in their affirmation of a positive, democratic conceptualisation of who Libya’s revolutionaries were, particularly to the international community.

6.4 Strategic Framing as a Meaning Making Practice

This chapter has sought to describe some of the ways in which meanings were actively constructed and strategically disseminated by the Libyan opposition movement in 2011. However, this discussion also highlights a central tension within framing theory that has customarily gone unremarked. To what extent can framing be a strategic activity, involving the tactical selection of resonant meanings (and the dismissal of inconvenient meanings) while also bringing to the forefront ‘the role of human agency in contentious action?’ (Noakes and Johnston 2005: 4) Some of the frames outlined above are incommensurate in their meanings, either contradicting co-

existent frames, or not necessarily cohering with the political reality on the Libyan ground. It has been argued that contradictions among a movement's beliefs or claims can lead to 'problematic' or limited mobilisation (Benford and Snow 2000: 620), but in fact, the existence of contradiction can also undermine the capacity for agentive articulation that the framing process purportedly engenders.

One of the potentially incongruent sets of frames in the Libyan uprising is the propounding of liberal democracy as prognosis and the collective advocacy of a *fatwa*-based motivational rhetoric. According to the NTC coordinator Yahya, they were mutually exclusive on the battlefield, where discussions of jihad sidelined the broader democratic discourse of the NTC: 'the people on the ground were only concerned about the fight and the jihad, not with questions of democracy'.²⁵⁶ The distinction between an 'Arab Spring' and 'Islamist Winter' (Totten et al 2012), which describes the hijacking of a youth led sequence of pro-democracy protests by well-coordinated Islamist groups, also appears to suggest the incommensurability of two distinctive political visions. It is thus argued that it was 'peaceful (and often secularly motivated)' crowds who rose up in Libya (Byman 2011: 76) and that 'Arab youth want democracy, not theocracy' (Esposito 2011).

Similarly, there is a tension between collectivist motivational frames that 'referred to the positions of tribes rather than any other social category' (Lacher 2013b: 156), and the concurrent positioning of the Libyan uprising as a fundamentally non-tribal form of political action, particularly to outsiders. However, these frames were co-existent during the period of mobilisation itself, and did not emerge during the aftermath of an initial revolutionary consensus, as implied by the Arab Spring-Islamist dichotomy.

²⁵⁶ Interview, 29 November 2011. Skype.

I would argue that one way in which these framings were permitted to co-exist was due to the lack of an elaboration upon, or confrontation of, potential differences within the anti-Qadhafi movement. LYM's co-founder Maryam described their discursive activities as fundamentally 'short-sighted' in nature – targeted towards facilitating the overthrow of Qadhafi – but as also limited in their dialogic impact: 'It was very much tunnel vision...I'd go on to Twitter, put out the information and just wouldn't look back'.²⁵⁷ The intense focus on strategically messaging the uprising meant that it was increasingly uncommon to 'venture out or talk to strangers' on the ground in Libya, or indeed, to address other Libyans with whom she had disagreements about the political future of Libya.²⁵⁸ Asef Bayat (2005: 901) has argued that 'unity of purpose is the hallmark, indeed a defining feature, of a social movement', but LYM's social movement operations suggest that unity of purpose can be imagined as much as it can be actively articulated. One activist, writing in *Al-Manarah*, celebrated the fact the consensus did not emerge from dialogue, but from the absence of it: Libyans 'agreed to protest against the regime, agreed to come out at the same time, supported military intervention, all without having to come to an agreement...have you ever seen a people agree as expertly as we have done?'.²⁵⁹

Ali, who participated in the capture of Qadhafi's military compound, Bab Al-Aziziya, in August 2011, affirmed that there was a strong sense of collectivity among anti-regime activists and combatants, but that this stemmed from the shared experience of surreptitiously resisting the regime inside its own stronghold, and was not due to an agreement over what form of governance would succeed the Qadhafi

²⁵⁷ Interview with Maryam, social media activist, 3 February 2015. Skype.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ al-Ajnaf, Alaa. "A letter to the dear reader" (*resala li azizi al-qari*). *Al-Manarah*. 5 August 2011. Issue 7: 10.

regime. Discussions of this sort were very rare.²⁶⁰ Indeed, he suggested that the clear and at times seemingly unattainable target - that 'the regime needed to go' - left little room for the discussion of political specifics. The exiled dissident Mustafa, who travelled to Misrata in May 2011, also argued that 'Everybody was united. There was no talk about divisions, about problems or issues. It was all to do with getting rid of Qadhafi'.²⁶¹ The absence of 'talk about divisions' suggests that divisions may well have existed, but that they were insufficiently articulated, or resolved, because their latent existence did not undermine collective political mobilisation.

Libyan activists also sustained the co-existence of potentially incommensurate frames by actively flouting what Hank Johnston (2005: 15) has described as the 'empirical credibility' of the framing process. Hamza, who was based in Benghazi, argued that:

The Christian Science Monitor and other papers tried to propagate the whole story of Islamists being around. We were like 'no, they don't exist'. That was the narrative amongst activists then and people in the Court - that Islamists just don't exist. There are no militants... When a journalist with a camera went to the front lines, one of the lawyers from the Courthouse came up with the bright idea of bringing a barber. And they were shaving all their beards and cutting their hair and stuff, for free... we kind of downplayed that narrative.²⁶²

The activists I interviewed disagreed on the extent to which such contentious aspects of the uprising were obfuscated, and on the rationales underpinning practices of concealment. The Benghazi-based activist Nada said that she subconsciously 'ignored' the increased presence of Islamist fighters in Benghazi in 2011, principally

²⁶⁰ Interview with Ali, rebel coordinator and fighter in Tripoli, 9 February 2015. Skype.

²⁶¹ Interview with Mustafa, anti-regime dissident and human rights campaigner, 4 March 2015. London.

²⁶² Interview with Hamza, anti-regime demonstrator and civil society activist, 4 April 2015. London.

because many Islamists were undertaking or supporting civil society activities at the time.²⁶³ The US-based activist Huda argued that her denial of the prevalence of Islamism and tribalism inside Libya was principally borne out her (and other Libyan diaspora activists') 'lack of knowledge' about the country itself.²⁶⁴

In other instances, it was conceded that concealment was a deliberate strategy. The NTC member Hussein argued that 'there were only 20 or so al-Qaeda fighters in Libya', and that camouflaging their presence was a necessary move on behalf of those representing the uprising: 'if I'd mentioned them, I would have damaged the Libyan cause'.²⁶⁵ In contrast, the NTC coordinator Yahya bluntly depicted this process of misrepresentation as more ubiquitous among Libyan activists: 'that was the lie we used in 2011, to say that there's no al-Qaeda. In fact, in some areas, Islamists comprised the majority of fighters'.²⁶⁶ The fighter Fawzi concurred, arguing that the concealment of the views of Islamist-inclined fighters was a deliberate media strategy, pursued in particular by Libya Al-Ahrar, which refused to give coverage to frontline Islamist-leaning fighters with non-congenial political opinions.²⁶⁷ Ahmed of LYM argued that the rise in the number of Islamist fighters, and other problematic aspects of the uprising, such as the presence of opportunism on the battlefields, became increasingly apparent as the uprising progressed, but he 'ignored it, glossed over it. I ignored the bad things and I said no, we're going to overcome this... And if I'd said any of those things out loud, I would have been a '*fattan*' [troublemaker]. I would have been instigating something'.²⁶⁸

²⁶³ Interview with Haleema, civil society activist in Benghazi, 29 March 2015. Tunisia.

²⁶⁴ Interview with Huda, Libyan-American social media activist, 9 June 2016. Skype.

²⁶⁵ Interview with Hussein, NTC representative, 7 November 2016, London.

²⁶⁶ Interview with Yahya, activist and NTC coordinator, 29 November 2016, Skype.

²⁶⁷ Interview with Fawzi, revolutionary fighter in western Libya, 29 December 2015. Skype.

²⁶⁸ Interview with Ahmed, social media activist, 25 February 2015, London.

The presence of discord within a social movement narrative has been interpreted as a limitation that necessitates articulated ‘frame alignment processes,’ or the rhetorical reconciliation of tensions, in order for political mobilisation to occur (Snow et al 1986). However, the framing process in the Libyan uprising suggests that the concealment or deferral of difference did not hinder the mobilisation process, but may have even served to prolong it. In addressing the Libyan populace in 2011, particularly within opposition-controlled territories, NTC members such as the Oil and Finance minister Ali Tarhouni argued that ‘this is not the time for change’, or a time to air contentious issues, such as the emergence of criminal behaviours on the military frontlines: ‘the country needs to be liberated...this right now is the main battle’.²⁶⁹ Hussein concedes that even within the NTC, ‘the differences were clear and existent back then...I know I disagreed with Muslim Brotherhood members as well as extreme secularists, but these were brushed under the carpet’.²⁷⁰

The act of concealing discord does not appear to have been a limitation for the uprising’s immediate, instrumental goals. The dissident Fayeze, however, emphasised that this was problematic from a long-term political perspective:

The mistake that people made back then was to lump them [the NTC] all together as ‘opposition’...they were different, and their attitude towards the change that was happening in Libya was different as well. There were fights in the transitional council between the Islamists and liberals. They were arguing about everything, from laws to the direction of the revolution. Even the Islamists didn’t form just one group, but were different too.²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ “Ali al-Tarhouni”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/m8i5Jn>. A similar sentiment was reiterated by the foreign minister Ali al-Issawi in an interview with *Al-Manarah*, in which he declared that ‘the issue of liberation’ should be the central priority for all involved in the uprising. Issue 5: 4-5.

²⁷⁰ Interview with Hussein. 7 November 2016, London.

²⁷¹ Interview with Fayeze. 27 January 2016, London.

Fayez describes the popular perception of the NTC's homogeneity as a 'mistake' because it gave the false impression that the uprising stood for near-universally shared values and ideals: an illusion that would be detrimental when the Qadhafi regime came to an end. Neither, he asserts, did the NTC clearly articulate an understanding of what terms such as 'freedom' and 'democracy' meant to Libyans themselves.²⁷² The prominent Libyan journalist Hisham al-Shewli also argued that the NTC – and in particular, Mahmoud Jibril – had so focused on obtaining legitimacy from the international community, that it had failed to discursively reflect, or even engage with, the heterogeneity in the Libyan populace's political hopes and aspirations.²⁷³ I would argue that this lack of discursive engagement permitted the existence of convenient contradictions, within the NTC's own internal composition, but also within the broader political discourse of the uprising as developed by Libyan activists. The implication here is that strategic framing was a short-term, mobilising procedure, instead of a clearly-articulated practice.

Despite their criticisms of revolutionary discourses in 2011, it is striking that Libyan activists' appraisal of their own activities challenges a central characteristic of the framing process: the emergence of choice. Noakes and Johnston (2005: 8) describe framing as a 'selective choice', and Jasper (2004: 2) has argued that 'if agency means anything, it would seem to involve choices', describing social movement decision-making as 'the act of selecting and applying tactics'. However, by drawing attention to their relative political insularity, or even to the imperative goal of toppling the Qadhafi regime and preventing further casualties, Libyan activists suggest that their strategic choices were conditioned by circumstances beyond their

²⁷² Interview with Fayez. 27 January 2016, London.

²⁷³ al-Shelwi, Hisham. "A state or a company?" (*dawla am shareka?*) *Al-Manarah*. 29 July 2011. Issue 6: 12.

control. As indicated above, this rationale was deployed for a variety of ends: to justify the exaggeration of the opposition's casualty figures in the initial few weeks of protests, to advocate for a no-fly zone, and to override potentially troubling differences between Libyans themselves. Activists 'had to' frame the Libyan uprising in the most politically effective way possible: 'that was a requirement, it was a must'.²⁷⁴

Activists' evaluation of their rhetorical practices as an unavoidable response to the Libyan crisis, or as not comprising an informed choice at all, must be understood within the context of Libya's post-revolutionary transitional collapse. Although social movement framing has been presented as an agentive practice that potentially empowers both activists and constituents (Snow et al 1986: 475), the post-uprising political landscape in Libya has in fact disempowered civilian actors, from the rival militia infighting that led to the collapse of central government in 2014 (Ciampi 2016: 30), to the assassination of human rights lawyers and political activists in Benghazi (Prashad 2016: 151), and the way in which Islamists have increasingly taken advantage of the political environment in the country (Benotman, Pack and Brandon 2013: 209).

As a result of these developments, some of the activists interviewed for this research questioned whether it was prudent for them to have supported the militarisation of the uprising, particularly in light of their lack of awareness about the nature of Islamist militancy inside Libya.²⁷⁵ Others argued that, in retrospect, the entire uprising may have been a 'conspiracy' against the Libyan people, either by intervening foreign powers such as Qatar,²⁷⁶ or by the NTC itself.²⁷⁷ According to

²⁷⁴ Interview with Hussein, NTC representative, 7 November 2016. London.

²⁷⁵ Interview with Haleema, civil society activist in Benghazi, 29 March 2015. Tunisia; Interview with Muna, civil society activist in Benghazi, 20 August 2011, Bristol.

²⁷⁶ Interview with Yasmin, women's rights activist, 11 March 2015. Essex.

Mansour, a member of the Benghazi Revolutionary Youth Commission (RYC), many activists in the group began to feel that Saif al-Islam al-Qadhafi, in his speech on 21 February, ‘was telling us the truth’ about the presence of Islamist extremists inside Libya, and that they had dismissed his words at their peril.²⁷⁸ In the context of such assessments, perceptions of political agency are not only enabled by the framing process, but may be undermined as a result of insincere or misinformed, but politically effective, framing practices. In turn, perceptions of agency are also shaped by the long-term political consequences of contentious activism.

Collective action framing in the Libyan uprising, by responding to and refuting the messaging of the Qadhafi regime, also positioned itself within the regime’s restrictive discursive parameters. This flags up the tension, noted in Chapter 3, with the way in which ‘frame resonance’ may ultimately undermine the contentious impact of representational activity. For instance, the opposition’s diagnostic framing reversed Qadhafi’s familiar rhetoric by positioning him as the solely culpable and agentive actor in the *Jamahiriyah*, without broaching the more problematic ways in which the *Jamahiriyah* had engendered popular complicity within its material and symbolic practices. This also meant that ex-regime figures were swiftly framed as having been internally ‘uncommitted’ to the Qadhafi regime, sidestepping the real tensions that existed on the battlefield over the complicity of some figures – such as Abdul Fattah Younes – in overseeing the detention of political dissidents (Fitzgerald 2015: 192). In turn, and during the uprising itself, Qadhafi’s early allegation that protesters were manipulated by al-Qaeda extremists spawned a competing denial of Islamist activity, while his warnings of impending tribal conflict shaped the way in which the NTC both mobilised along tribal lines, organising parallel conferences to the Qadhafi

²⁷⁷ Interview with Khaled, pro-opposition lawyer in Zawiyah, 26 March 2015. Tunisia.

²⁷⁸ Interview with Mansour, demonstrator and civil society activist, 24 April 2016. Skype.

regime, while simultaneously denying that tribalism was a relevant mode of political organisation in Libya.

It has been argued that the construction and dissemination of meanings, even for strategic ends, is not a boundless activity. Steinberg (2002: 210) has cautioned against ‘excessive voluntarism’ when analysing framing practices, arguing that such activity is shaped by ‘cultural meanings’ structural characteristics independent of actors’ control’. In this instance, the ‘cultural meanings’ that shaped the logics of activism were the symbolic and material practices undertaken by the *Jamahiriya*. Moreover, framing was also shaped by the short-term instrumental goals adopted by activists, which may not always reinforce – and may even undermine - the agentive, meaning making component of framing practices.

It is important to note that the tensions that were sidelined or concealed by the Libyan opposition increasingly began to emerge near the conclusion of the military campaign in August 2011, signaling a move away from revolutionary consensus, and towards attempts to shape the post-Qadhafi political environment. Benghazi’s *Mayadeen* newspaper began to attack the heightened Islamist discourse in the constitutional consultation process, arguing that ‘we do not want to replace Qadhafi with Khomeini’,²⁷⁹ whereas *Al-Manarah* claimed that ‘secularist factions are now undertaking a campaign to undermine the entire Islamist current’.²⁸⁰ On the military front, commanders such as Mohammed Sheiter from the Union of Revolutionary Brigades argued in August 2011 for the pre-eminence of fighters in post-Qadhafi Libya: ‘this is not a peaceful revolution, and this is not the revolution of the

²⁷⁹ “Correcting the path of the February revolution” (*tasheeh masar thawrat fibrayir*). *Mayadeen*. 26 July 2011. Issue 11: 2.

²⁸⁰ al-Shelwi, Hisham. “The dissolution of the Executive Committee is the first political crisis” (*iqalat al-maktab al-tanfeethee awwal asefa siyassiya*). *Al-Manarah*. 12 August 2011. Issue 8: 7.

courthouse...this is an armed revolution’.²⁸¹ Conversely, journalists writing in the same newspaper began to note the risks of vigilantism and militia autonomy after the overthrow of the Qadhafi regime.²⁸² However, the mobilising rhetoric throughout the preceding revolutionary period had actively denied the existence of such political differences, instead of confronting or reconciling them.

Within the social movement literature, omission is seen as a conventional element of collective action framing. Noakes and Johnston (2005: 7) state that all interpretive packages must ‘highlight some issues, and ignore others’, and even go on to argue that a degree of ‘cynicism’ by movement entrepreneurs is actually positive, enabling strategic marketing pitches to bring on board different audiences (ibid: 14). However, although this assessment elaborates upon the causal impact of framing on political mobilisation, it once again says little about the way in which rhetorical obfuscation, and movement cynicism in general, can impact upon the agentive dimensions of the framing process. The preceding discussion has sought to reverse the assumptions within the social movement literature, indicating the way in which the acceptance of contradictory frames helped to sustain participation in the Libyan uprising, and effectively enabled the co-existence of incommensurate interpretive packages with compatible political objectives. However, the pursuit of such strategic objectives by the Libyan opposition arguably undermined the extent to which the framing process facilitated the active articulation and clarification of collective political understandings. As a result, assessing framing principally on the degree to which it can mobilise and recruit participants (Johnston 2009: 6) neglect some of the agentive dimensions of meaning making practices.

²⁸¹ “Interview with Mohammed Sheiter” (*muqabala ma’aa Mohammed Sheiter*). *Al- Manarah*. 12 August 2011. Issue 8: 7.

²⁸² al-Raedh, Mustafa. “The motivations of a revolution and the demands of a state” (*hawafiz al-thawra wa-mutatallabat al-dawla*). *Al- Manarah* 15 July 2011. Issue 4: 8.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter centres on the conceptualisation of political agency as a strategic, representational practice, and has analysed this representational activity using social movement framing theory. It has demonstrated the way in which members of the Libyan opposition crafted a series of interpretive packages, or collective action frames, in an effort to topple the Qadhafi regime, collaborating across a range of emergent organisational networks in the process, and generating meanings that publically exposed and even undermined the contradictions present in the *Jamahiriya*'s institutional logic. This emergence of contentious representational activity signified a radical shift from the delimitation and cooptation of political agency under Qadhafi's rule.

However, this chapter has also sought to approach the social movement framework reflexively and critically. By re-centering the element of 'agency' in its analysis, it has argued that there is a tension between the strategic use of framing for mobilisation purposes, and framing theory's nominal emphasis on actors' social construction of reality. Although the Libyan uprising's framing process was in many respects well-coordinated, at times 'cynical' (Noakes and Johnston 2005: 13) in its marketing orientation, and politically successful by the standards embraced by social movement practitioners, political actors maintained and even instrumentalised the presence of internal contradictions within the interpretive packages they produced. Tensions within collective action frames were occasionally concealed, obfuscated or insufficiently articulated in the pursuit of the uprising's short-term political objectives. Understanding obfuscation as a limitation, rather than as strength, problematises the broader premise that contestation in the Arab uprisings involved a people saying 'what it wants, whenever it wants' (Bell 2013). This view of agency

overlooks the way in which representations are shaped by existent, institutional contexts of meaning, as well as by the emergent discursive and material landscape of a particular contentious moment.

Where this chapter has explored the emergence of political agency as a strategic practice, the following chapter will examine political agency in the Libyan uprising as a symbolic, representational practice. This shift in focus is partly empirical, turning from away strategic, discursive frames towards an analysis of cultural productions during the uprising, but it is also grounded in the theoretical premise that symbolic contestation does not simply seek ‘resonance’ with a set of meanings, but potentially, a more radical transformation of them.

Symbolic Contestation in the Libyan Uprising

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter investigated the emergence of political agency in the Libyan uprising by unpacking the strategic representational practices undertaken by the opposition movement. In the process, it underscored the tension between meaning making as an agentive activity and strategy as a political imperative. This chapter, in line with a theoretical framework that conceives of agency as both strategic and symbolic, will shift its conceptual focus towards understanding the symbolic dimensions of representational practices during moments of open political contestation. It is premised on the argument, contained within the resistance literature, that the definitional practices of a marginalised group can overturn dominant symbolic classifications of the social world, and in doing so ‘construct alternative forms of subjectivity and sociality’ (Juris and Sitrin 2006: 32), for bystanders as well as participants (Scott 1990: 226).

The first section of this chapter will delineate the way in which Libyan actors sought to overturn the *Jamahiriya*’s symbolic order by repudiating its ideological content and its pervasive, iconographic presence. This builds on the discussion in Chapter 5 of this thesis, which described the way in which public space was cluttered with valorising representations of Qadhafi, and ideology was publically re-performed according to the strictures of the *Jamahiriya*’s ‘rhetorical universe’ (Wedeen 1999:

25). Repudiation of the *Jamahiriya*'s symbolic order, by departing from the 'disingenuous reproduction of state propaganda' (Cherstich 2014: 95-97) reconfigured the established conventions on publically political expression. However, subversion alone is not sufficient for the transformation of a dominant system of meaning (Jefferess 2008: 14-15) but must be accompanied by the establishment of an alternative set of meanings, relationships and even practices (Juris and Sitrin 2016: 40). This insight is also affirmed in the understanding of institutions, and institutional change, as comprised of interrelated symbolic and material practices (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008). The second section of this chapter will thus outline the content of the Libyan uprising's alternative symbolic order, and indicate the ways in which its redefinition of Libyan national identity partially materialised in the emergence of new forms of collective, civic activity during the uprising itself.

Studies of resistance have cautioned against romanticising the struggles of subordinate groups, noting the intersectionality and entanglement of power and resistance (Abu-Lughod 1990; Wedeen 1999; Sharp et al 2000) and the fact that acts of critique generate their own exclusions, hierarchies and dominations (Veesser 1989; Juris and Sirtrin 2016). The final section of the chapter will therefore critically analyse the hierarchies generated within the Libyan revolutionary symbolic order, and interpret the extent to which these generated an exclusionary 'routinization of interests' (Friedland and Alford 1991: 245) in the material sphere. Although agency is implicit in the very emergence of representational practices (Khatib 2013b), the agentive transformation of dominant 'cultural schemas' (Sewell 1992: 19) is a far more challenging undertaking, and can only be assessed through a reflexive engagement with the Libyan uprising's newly-established symbolic order.

7.2 The Subversion of the *Jamahiriya*'s Symbolic Order

Institutional struggle, according to Friedland and Alford (1991: 250), is not simply about effecting material change, but involves a contestation over the symbols and categorical structures that all institutions engender and sustain: in particular, the way in which 'power and interest' are defined. Although this claim is extended towards all institutions, this conflict arguably takes on a heightened significance in authoritarian contexts. Authoritarian regimes overemploy symbolic displays of power in their attempts to manipulate and manage systems of signification (Wedeen 1999: 5). As a result, the cultural terrain is transformed into a site of 'struggle over presence, over visibility' that effectively represents the broader conflict between authoritarian political power and popular political agency (Khatib 2013b: 1).

During the Libyan uprising, the 'struggle over presence' was an emergent phenomenon that differed in form and intensity depending on the location of its production. For instance, where anti-regime graffiti was surreptitiously produced and swiftly erased in regime-controlled cities such as Tripoli throughout the uprising (Abushagur 2011), opposition-controlled territories saw the emergence of specifically designated creative spaces, from the music studios inside the 17 February Media Centre in Benghazi,²⁸³ to the 'revolutionary museums' that showcased anti-regime artwork in Yefren and Misrata,²⁸⁴ and to newspapers such as *Mayadeen*, which dedicated columns to the display of revolutionary fiction, artwork and poetry from its first issue.²⁸⁵ The *Jamahiriya*'s 'visibility' was more publically compromised in some places than in others, and the cultural productions that emerged in opposition-

²⁸³ Interview with Haleema, civil society activist in Benghazi, 29 March 2015. Tunisia.

²⁸⁴ Interview with Tareq, social media activist and translator, 14 February 2015. Oxford.

²⁸⁵ *Mayadeen*. 1 May 2011. Issue 1: 20-24.

controlled territories, from artwork and graffiti to planned demonstrations, were more visually sophisticated and even distinctly celebratory in tone.²⁸⁶

Nevertheless, cultural productions across Libya were comparable in two respects. Firstly, they possessed strongly subversive representational content: in particular, they sought to unmask the carefully-cultivated image of the ‘Brother Leader’ – the locus of political authority in the *Jamahiriya* – and to re-represent him in a parodied and chastened form. In addition, they can also be described as part of the ‘collective elaboration of meaning’ (Doerr et al 2015: 556) in that they borrowed from, and contributed to, an emergent anti-regime aesthetic that was mirrored in different cities inside Libya, and that intersected across different genres of cultural production.

At the very outset of protests in Libya, Qadhafi’s visual presence was literally erased through the public demolition of billboards featuring his image, and the private destruction of portraits of the Libyan leader that had formerly populated Libyan households and businesses.²⁸⁷ Very quickly, however, crowds went beyond such acts of destruction, and actively turned Qadhafi into an object of ridicule, chanting slogans and carrying placards and cartoons that mocked his physical appearance (Khalil 2014: 99). These productions immediately revoked the established terms of public address for Qadhafi: in place of ‘the leader’ there was now simply ‘*Muammar*’; in place of Qadhafi’s middle name ‘Abu Minyar’, there emerged the term ‘*Bu Shafshufa*’ (the one with frizzy hair), a nickname that lampooned Qadhafi’s unruly hair and unkempt

²⁸⁶ For instance, there was a phenomenon of ‘solidarity’ demonstrations within opposition-controlled cities that elaborated satirical anti-regime slogans at length, displayed posters and artwork, and were often participated in or even led by children. See this demonstration in Zintan as one such instance: <https://goo.gl/LnG3ud>

²⁸⁷ “Tearing images of Qadhafi”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/QGjTpX>

appearance.²⁸⁸ The adulatory terms previously adopted by Qadhafi – ‘king of kings’, ‘the only falcon’, ‘the warrior’ – were undercut by being scrawled next to mocking cartoons of a dishevelled Qadhafi,²⁸⁹ or by being followed up with assertions such as ‘you’ve been toppled by the Facebook generation’ in revolutionary music.²⁹⁰

Libyans thus contested what James Scott (1989: 57) has described as the ‘norms of law, custom, politeness, deference, loyalty’ that had previously sustained the *Jamahiriyah*’s symbolic order. They dispensed with its obsequious conversational strictures, addressing Qadhafi casually and dismissively during celebratory gatherings in eastern Libya: ‘*Shafshufa*, no hard feelings!’²⁹¹ In addition, they publically derided Qadhafi’s eccentric remarks and rhetorical mannerisms, thereby abandoning the former mock deference towards Qadhafi’s speeches prior to the uprising, and signalling the breach of the frontier between ‘public acts of compliance and ‘hidden transcripts’ of dissent (Scott 1990: 202). The expressions that Qadhafi directed towards his supporters, in his speech on 22 February, were parodied in revolutionary artwork: ‘onwards’ (*ela al-amam*),²⁹² ‘march on’ (*ezhafo*),²⁹³ ‘we have not used force yet’ (*nahno lam nastekhdem al-quwwa baad*),²⁹⁴ ‘revolution revolution revolution’ (*thawra thawra thawra*),²⁹⁵ ‘I am staying here’ (*ana ga'id hena*),²⁹⁶ and most famously, ‘alleyway to alleyway’ (*zenga zenga*) which was swiftly transformed into one of the defining chants of the uprising: ‘alleyway by alleyway, room by room –

²⁸⁸ These appellations were integrated in one of the most popular anti-regime slogans in the uprising: ‘Muammar, *the one with frizzy hair*: you’ll [finally] see who the Libyan people are’. *Mayadeen* compiled a list of this and other similar revolutionary slogans in an article titled “The use of humour against the regime”. 19 July 2011, Issue 10: 15.

²⁸⁹ Appendix: Figure 3. Khadija Teri

²⁹⁰ Usood al-Assema. “It’s Over, *Shafshufa*’ (*Tammit ya shafshufa*). 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/mB2JEj>

²⁹¹ Interview with Hamza, anti-regime demonstrator and civil society activist, 4 April 2015. London.

²⁹² Appendix: Figure 4. Khadija Teri.

²⁹³ Appendix: Figure 5. Soumiea Abushagur.

²⁹⁴ Appendix: Figure 6. Mark Kersten.

²⁹⁵ Appendix: Figure 7. Mark Kersten.

²⁹⁶ Appendix: Figure 3. Khadija Teri

Qadhafi, you've brought shame on us' (*zenga zenga dar dar, ya Qadhafi dert al-aar*).²⁹⁷

Libyans' engagement with, and satirical re-presentation of, Qadhafi's discourse, reflects the way in which meaning making practices are an emergent, processual phenomenon. The ability to openly challenge Qadhafi's authority was repeatedly presented in revolutionary rhetoric as an indication that there was no longer any 'barrier of fear' preventing Libyans from criticising the Qadhafi regime.²⁹⁸ However, despite lampooning his words, activists also represented them as dangerous and credible threats against the Libyan people. Cultural productions were thus ambivalently caught between affirming the violence and brutality of the Qadhafi regime, and actively constructing its destructibility.

In line with the former presentation, revolutionary artwork often literally depicted Qadhafi as the devil,²⁹⁹ brandishing or executing his victims and surrounded by bloodshed.³⁰⁰ Numerous illustrations abounded of Qadhafi bearing the Star of David, with slogans referring to Qadhafi as 'Jewish'.³⁰¹ These have been interpreted as an indication of troubling anti-Semitism within the opposition camp,³⁰² but they can also be interpreted as referencing the common trope of Israel as a foreign agent and the enemy of Arabs. This image is deployed as a way of expressing fearful and clandestine perceptions of Qadhafi inside Libya: for instance, longstanding rumours that Qadhafi was an Israeli agent sent to damage Libya and Libyans (Cherstich 2014:

²⁹⁷ "Demonstration in Zintan, 11 March 2011". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/24i9zM>

²⁹⁸ Shaeb, Ashraf. "Ramadan with a different flavour" (*Ramadan bi'taam mukhtalif*). *Al-Manarah*. 22 July 2011. Issue 5: 3.

²⁹⁹ Appendix: Figure 18. *Associated Press*.

³⁰⁰ Appendix: Figure 8. Rory Mulholland; Figure 9. C.J. Chivers; Figure 10. Khadija Teri.

³⁰¹ For illustrations, see Appendix: Figure 9 and Figure 11. C.J. Chivers; Figure 12. Mark Kersten. For slogans, see "Women's movement protest in Jadu". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/FVxx3x>, and the "Statement of Allegiance by Arada Youth". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/cqxhP6>

³⁰² Chivers, C.J. "Libyan Street Art: Freedom, Defiance and Troubling Signs". *New York Times*. 8 August 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/JJTkGd>.

104), or that his Qadhafi's brutality was evidence of his dubious Libyan heritage.³⁰³

The common convergence of symbols such as the swastika and the Star of David in anti-regime artwork is less evidence of coherent political positions than it is an indiscriminate amalgamation of all things that the *Jamahiriyah* had denounced as evil.

This demonisation of Qadhafi existed alongside a popular trend of caricature that, despite the on-going warfare against the Qadhafi regime, actively imagined him as militarily and politically feeble: crushed and humiliated by the Libyan opposition, or cowering away from revolutionary symbols emblazoned with phrases such as 'the will of the people' (*iradat al-sha'b*).³⁰⁴ His paternalistic symbolism was rejected, and he was depicted as merely the father of his own, physical, 'corrupt family'.³⁰⁵ As argued by Igor Cherstich (2014: 109), because 'caricatures, more than any other form of representation, affirm flesh and identity...through visual reappropriation Gaddafi had gained a tangible subjectivity which was only once latent...the ghost could be hurt, touched, killed'. Artwork thus rearticulated the temporality of the Libyan political universe: it was retrospective, amplifying existent, subversive narratives about the Qadhafi regime; it was present-oriented, responding to unfolding political developments and statements by Qadhafi, and it was inventive, serving to concretise the opposition's arduous military objectives. The act of repeatedly illustrating Qadhafi as powerless, even within regime-controlled cities such as Tripoli, imbued illustrators with a sense of 'freedom' from the regime that was subjectively powerful,³⁰⁶ even if freedom from the regime hadn't yet been fully attained in the political or military spheres.

³⁰³ "Interim Libyan government wins support". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/V3fKZi>

³⁰⁴ Appendix: Figure 13, 14 and 15. C.J. Chivers; Figure 8. Mark Kersten; Figure 13. Khadija Teri.

³⁰⁵ Appendix: Figure 17. Mark Kersten.

³⁰⁶ "Interview with Tareq Juma Abu Ayanna, '7iber'". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/hz1J1u>

The representational significance of such cultural productions is partly derived from their subversive content, but also, I would argue, because they constituted a ‘collective elaboration of meaning’ (Doerr et al 2015: 556). They emerged in a horizontal way, reflecting the diverse understandings and grievances of Libyans, and subsequently populated the visual and rhetorical landscape with grassroots meanings. Certain tropes were naturally popularised and re-adapted by Libyans across the country, such as the image of Qadhafi urging his supporters onwards while riding backwards on a donkey (Abushagur 2011). Other texts underwent creative, spontaneous shifts between genre, form and medium. For instance, the patriotic revolutionary anthem ‘Libya has Called’ (*Leebya nadit*) by Asma Saleem was frequently re-performed by groups of youth in opposition-controlled territories. In one variant in Benghazi, the tune was preserved but its lyrics were adapted to commemorate the Danish cartoon protests held at the Italian consulate in Benghazi in February 2006: ‘You can bring a plane, and you can bring tanks; from the days of the consulate, the Libyan people stopped being afraid’.³⁰⁷ Libyan street art ultimately proclaimed its capacity to speak for a ‘collective consciousness’ (Chaffee 1993: 15) in its juxtaposition of Qadhafi with images of the ‘the Libyan people’, who were at times depicted as triumphant, and at others as impoverished and subjugated.³⁰⁸

Similarly, political slogans also underwent creative shifts and adaptations, depending on the context of their utterance. As argued by Colla (2012), ‘slogans are not literary texts’ but part of a broader contentious performance: ‘embodied actions taking place in particular situations’. Chants that originated on the streets, such as ‘the blood of the martyrs won’t go to waste’ (*dam el-shuhada ma yim-sheeh haba*) and

³⁰⁷ “Muammar you cockroach” (*Muammar ya sarsoor*). YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/1WQ3LG>

³⁰⁸ Appendix: Figures 9, 10 and 13. C.J. Chivers. Figure 12. Mark Kersten.

‘youth of the capital, we need a decisive night’ (*ya shabab el-assema, nibbo layla hasema*) were incorporated into the music of the uprising,³⁰⁹ replayed on military battlefronts,³¹⁰ or simply reaffirmed in the video declarations (*bayanat*) of allegiance to the February 17 uprising that were issued across Libya.³¹¹ Anti-Qadhafi slogans were posted and shared on the Libyan opposition’s social media platforms, where they were collectively discussed and embellished.³¹² Video footage of demonstrations across Libya reveals the way in which the very act of sloganeering was a collaborative process: it would often be spearheaded by a central individual, but would also incorporate impromptu contributions from other participants.

In such collective texts, the repudiation of the *Jamahiriya*’s symbolic order focused substantially on undermining the figure of Qadhafi, and has been analysed principally from this angle (Khatib 2013b; Cherstich 2014). Libyan street art, which largely lampooned Qadhafi, contrasts with the anti-capitalist and even hip-hop inspired graffiti in Tunisia and Egypt: a distinction that can be attributed to the centrality of Qadhafi within the country’s personalist political and symbolic structures. However, subversive rhetoric during the uprising also dismantled the *Jamahiriya*’s broader system of meaning. As argued in Chapter 5, engendering and preserving contradiction was a central dimension of the *Jamahiriya*’s institutional logic; in turn, the act of exposing contradiction within a symbolic order is a key aspect of the reinterpretation of prevailing institutional symbols and practices (Thornton and Ocasio 2008: 115). Revolutionary cultural productions subverted the *Jamahiriya*’s symbolism, not only by amplifying these tensions and contradictions, but also by

³⁰⁹ See “Only Libya” (*leebya wa bas*) by Salah Ghali and “Rise Up, Tripoli” (*tarablus nudelah*) by Shokri al-Aroosi. Both available at: <https://goo.gl/mB2JEj>

³¹⁰ Interview with Fawzi, revolutionary fighter in western Libya, 29 December 2015. Skype.

³¹¹ “Statement by Free Women of Soug Al-Juma”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/faUv7G>

³¹² See the Facebook page “Slogans and Chants of the 17 February Revolution”, set up on 19 April 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/xqc29q>

representing this moment of disclosure as one that was transformative of the hitherto-suppressed political subjectivities of Libyans.

During the Libyan uprising, the disruption of the *Jamahiriya*'s broader symbolism evolved from acts of physical destruction – such as the mass burning of copies of *The Green Book* in Benghazi during the first week of protests - to a discursive refutation of its contradictory underpinnings. Central to the *Jamahiriya*'s institutional logic was the word 'revolution'. The term had been deployed by the regime as a perennial justification for the instatement of 'protective' coercive bodies such as the revolutionary committees, and was central to the regime's convenient bifurcation of formal and informal political authority.³¹³ In the *Jamahiriya*, national belonging, and even dignity, were premised on the strength and degree of one's commitment to Qadhafi's on-going revolution.

The music of the 17 February uprising occasionally addressed Qadhafi directly on this front, labelling the *Jamahiriya*'s revolution 'obscene',³¹⁴ transforming the pro-Qadhafi anthem 'O' Leader of Our Revolution' into 'O' Betrayal of Our Revolution',³¹⁵ and refuting Qadhafi's ideological doctrine of People Power (*sultat ash-sha'ab*): 'When you first arrived, you told us it was a popular revolution; you called it a *Jamahiriya*, but it was a dictatorship'.³¹⁶ Moreover, Libyans contested the proclaimed political, social and economic accomplishments that Qadhafi had attributed to his revolution. This was particularly evident in Libyan hip-hop, which deployed cutting lyricism, issued in a colloquial Libyan dialect, in its attacks on the regime. Qadhafi's characterisation of Libya as a militarily empowered 'armed nation'

³¹³ Indeed, Qadhafi continued to sustain this incommensurability between rhetoric and practice in his address on 22 February 2011, arguing that he was no more than a revolutionary figurehead in Libya: 'If I really had authority, and the power to rule, I would have thrown it in your faces'. Speech available at: <https://goo.gl/Q7q8Fi>

³¹⁴ "Eyes that Bleed". Available at: <https://goo.gl/mB2JEj>

³¹⁵ "O Betrayal of Our Revolution" (*ya khain thawretna*). YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/fP3grr>

³¹⁶ Shabab Tarabulus. "I'm a Tripolitanian" (*ana tarabulsi*). Available at: <https://goo.gl/mB2JEj>

(*al-sha'b al-musallah*) was vilified as patently untrue in Ibn Thabit's rap song 'Anthem for the Libyan Warrior': 'He speaks of the "armed nation", go to hell you liar... This is real Libyan nationalism, so go learn the meaning of the phrase "the people's revolution"''.³¹⁷ Other songs criticise the dubious infrastructural achievements underpinning the regime's claim to have fostered prosperity inside Libya: 'A few roads and buildings... every year you inflate them and pretend that they're great achievements'.³¹⁸

The song 'Lies and Pain' by the rapper M.C. Swat also notes the failure of the *Jamahiriyah* to live up to its self-aggrandising rhetoric, in this instance by emphasising the deficiencies in its education system. However, he also argues that the regime imbedded a much more nefarious societal distrust: 'They made us live in hatred of others, they wiped my thinking. From the first day I was born, they started to destroy me'.³¹⁹ The *Jamahiriyah* is held accountable both for its material inadequacies and for inhibiting the emergence of autonomous political subjectivities. In this particular song, its material and symbolic practices of domination are condemned for what Scott (1990: 74) has described as the driving of personal aspiration into the realm of the impossible: 'The future was never a word in my vocabulary'.³²⁰

In undermining the regime's system of meaning, Libyans channelled their institutionalised familiarity with the regime's rhetorical universe. A statement in support of the uprising by a group of then-anonymous female activists in the Souq al-Juma district of Tripoli quotes directly from *The Green Book* in order to affirm the insincerity of the regime's claimed empowerment of women in Libya:

³¹⁷ Ibn Thabit. "Anthem for the Libyan Warrior" (*nasheed lil-mujahid al-leebee*). Available at: <https://goo.gl/mB2JEj>

³¹⁸ Usood al-Assema. "It's Over, Shafshufa" (*tammit ya shafshufa*). Ibid.

³¹⁹ M.C. Swat. "Lies and Pain". Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

We say to the tyrant that the ‘woman’ you’re speaking on behalf of has never supported you, and has always been against you... You have never given her any dignity. He said in his ‘Vile Book’ that ‘all societies look at the woman as a commodity, nothing more’. You are the only who brought mercenaries, and treated women as commodities and as slaves. In Chapter One of his Book, he refers to ‘The Solution to the Problem’. The only solution is that he leaves [Libya] with his sons. In Chapter Two, he refers to ‘The Economic Solution’. What economy and everything [in Libya] is in ruins?³²¹

The statement engages explicitly and methodically with *The Green Book*, refuting its discourse by amplifying both past and present political grievances. In doing so, it affirms a point that is often highlighted in cultural productions: the notion that Libyans had always questioned or disbelieved in the veracity of the *Jamahiriya*’s moral authority. Repeatedly, creative revolutionary texts point towards and celebrate the newfound capacity for the public articulation of concealed experiences: the notion that people ‘always wanted to talk about Gaddafi’s mistakes and crimes, but we never had the chance for free speech’.³²² Libyans could ‘finally’ express their thoughts after decades of suppression.³²³ Making private experiences public, or the moment when ‘an entire category of people suddenly finds its public voice is no longer stifled’ (Scott 1990: 66), is important, according to Pierre Bourdieu (1979: 71), because it is a ‘step on the road to officialization and legitimization’, enabling the populace to demand accountability and initiating the process of constructing an alternative system of meaning. It is also important, I would argue, because it enabled Libyans to re-contextualise their formerly private experiences, and indeed, to reclaim their own

³²¹ “Statement by Free Women of Soug Al-Juma”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/faUv7G>

³²² Abbott, Sebastian. “Rap music inspires Libyan rebels to defeat Gaddafi”. *Mail & Guardian*. 26 April 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/k94JDW>

³²³ Teri, Khadija. “Libyan Street Art”. Available at: <https://goo.gl/wEryL1>

political agency: to position their grievances as stemming from longstanding, but suppressed, resentments.

Lastly, symbolic contestation by Libyans subverted not only the content and contradictions of the *Jamahiriyah*'s symbolic order, but the fearful discursive dynamics that it had engendered in the Libyan public sphere. The Benghazi-based blogger Haleema argued that it was fearless protesters who undertook the first wave of anti-regime demonstrations, but that this further generated an unstoppable momentum of political expression: 'people were writing and expressing their thoughts without being scared of the revolutionary committees or internal security'.³²⁴ According to the Zawiyah-based lawyer Khaled, the largest demonstrations in the city were triggered principally by the humiliating political rhetoric and finger wagging directed at Libyans by Saif al-Islam Qadhafi, in his appearance on state television in February 2011. Participating in those demonstrations generated a sense of 'relief' that was borne out of no longer having to tolerate the countless insults issued by Qadhafi towards the Libyan people.³²⁵

As suggested by Lisa Wedeen (1999: 45), the subversion of an authoritarian regime's perspective grammar can facilitate the emergence of 'people's understandings of themselves as publically political persons'. By positioning emergent subjectivities as a central dimension of symbolic contestation, it is possible to offer a non-instrumental interpretation of the cultural productions that emerged throughout the uprising. For instance, Reem, a female activist residing in Tripoli, described the surreptitious means by which she and other women were able to stitch the tricolour revolutionary flag during the uprising, 'making sure that we bought the green, red and black sewing thread from different shops so that no one would get

³²⁴ Interview with Haleema, civil society activist in Benghazi, 29 March 2015. Tunisia.

³²⁵ Interview with Khaled, pro-opposition lawyer in Zawiyah, 26 March 2015. Tunisia.

suspicious'.³²⁶ Although they never attempted to publically display the flags on the streets of Tripoli, as other activists such as the Free Generation Movement did (Hilsum 2012: 221), the mere process of creating them was a sufficiently empowering form of self-expression. Similarly, Tareq Abu Ayanna, who produced anti-regime caricatures inside Tripoli from April 2011, also asserted that the very act of compulsively drawing the regime's latest pronouncements diminished his own fear of the regime, despite the fact that he kept his artwork concealed while Qadhafi remain in control of the capital.³²⁷

Libyan activists have emphasised that the subjective impact of open, political expression was particularly felt during the initial emergence of political activity in February 2011. When protests first broke out in Benghazi, according to Ahmed, the slogans issued by protesters deeply resonated with and unearthed a latent sense of dignity inside Libyans. Chants such as 'rise up Benghazi, this is the day you've been waiting for' and 'Benghazi, why the humiliation? We need a solution tonight' were simultaneously empowering at a personal level but also made it 'impossible' for people to stay inside their homes in good conscience.³²⁸ The matter of speaking up publically against the regime became intimately connected to 'our personal pride...we can't be the only country that doesn't do this'.³²⁹ Consequently, as another activist explained, participation in the protests and in acts of creative expression unearthed a hitherto dormant 'political' personality: 'maybe all along, I had been political without knowing it'.³³⁰

³²⁶ Interview with Reem, women's rights activist in Tripoli, 15 March 2015. Skype.

³²⁷ "Interview with Tareq Juma Abu Ayanna, '7iber'". Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1sa6NNKpGY>

³²⁸ Interview with Ahmed, social media activist, 25 February 2015. London.

³²⁹ Interview with Marwa, civil society activist in Benghazi, 23 January 2016. London.

³³⁰ Interview with Najib, opposition medical doctor in western Libya, 30 December 2015. Skype.

This section has described the ways in which Libyans contested the *Jamahiriya*'s symbolic order through a myriad of expressive practices: from humorous slogans to satirical graffiti and anti-*Jamahiriya* hip-hop. It has been argued that the act of undercutting a dominant rhetoric is most powerful when it exposes the disconnect between what a prevailing system of practice claims to do, and what it achieves in reality (Howell 2012: 46). In this vein, symbolic representational practices represented 'a dramatic contradiction of the smooth surface of euphemized power' (Scott 1990: 56) by rupturing the routines of political compliance that had formerly sustained the *Jamahiriya*'s visible dominance over public space, and by indicating that such routines had, in fact, been disingenuous. Cultural productions were subversive in their contestation of the *Jamahiriya*'s prescriptive ideological and discursive norms, collective in their grassroots mode of emergence and development, and empowering in their transformation of activists' own understandings of themselves as publically political persons.

7.3 The 17 February Revolutionary Symbolic Order

The dismantling of well-established, seemingly permanent meanings (Hall 1985: 113) and the manipulation of symbols within an institutional context (Friedland and Alford 1991: 25) are markers of political agency and important aspects of the struggle over classification. However, a transformation, rather than rejection, of a system of meaning must involve the active reinterpretation of symbols and the establishment of an alternative symbolic order. In the context of the *Jamahiriya*, the classificatory practices deployed by the regime were particularly imposing, substantially inhibiting the self-representational practices of the Libyan public. Libyan citizens were

presented as internalising the leader, partly as a result of what Wedeen (1999: 17) has described as the semiotic ‘narrowing of the gap’ between ruler and ruled in authoritarian regimes, and partly because Qadhafi’s rhetorical practices went even further, seeking the complete identification of ‘Libya’ with ‘Qadhafi’. Qadhafi asserted, in his speech on 22 February 2011, that:

In the past, a Libyan had no identity. When you would say to someone ‘I’m a Libyan’, they would reply ‘Libya...Liberia? Lebanon?’ They didn’t know Libya. But today, when you say I’m a Libyan, they reply ‘Oh Libya, Qadhafi! Libya, the Revolution!’³³¹

Libyan activists asserted that the imposition of this classificatory schema damaged their own sense of national identity. Mohammed Ismail argued that ‘you would never hear anything good about Libya. It was either the Lockerbie bombing, or Qadhafi did this, or he did that. And Qadhafi was always the face of Libya. That in itself diminished everyone’s identity of being a Libyan’.³³² The Benghazi-based activist Layal distinguished between the powerful ‘love that Benghazi people have for their city’ and the absence of any affective sentiment for Libya as a country.³³³ The *Jamahiriya*’s exclusionary delimitation of Libyan identity was furthered in Saif al-Islam Qadhafi’s characterisation of the 17 February protesters as manipulated youth and ‘drug addicts’, and in Qadhafi’s construction of a binary Libyan political identity comprised of ‘revolutionary Al-Fateh youth’ nobly struggling against ‘rats’ (*jirdaan*).³³⁴ This sweeping dismissal of the Libyan opposition led protesters to conceptualise an alternative political identity for the Libyan people that did not define

³³¹ “Muammar al-Qadhafi’s speech”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/Q7q8Fi>

³³² Interview with Umar, journalist and photographer, 14 January 2016. Skype.

³³³ Interview with Marwa, civil society activist in Benghazi, 23 January 2016. London.

³³⁴ “Muammar al-Qadhafi’s speech”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/Q7q8Fi>; “Saif al-Islam’s speech”. YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1J_oECAgEto

national worth or power through allegiance to the *Jamahiriya*, and that was in turn buttressed by an alternative set of political symbols.

The definitional practices of the Libyan opposition during the uprising were underpinned by a renunciation of Qadhafi's depiction of protesters as 'rats', and galvanised by the notorious moment in Qadhafi's speech in which he demanded of the Libyan protesters: 'Who are you?' (*'man antum?'*) This statement ushered in a multitude of responses – in the form of public speeches, poems, music and artwork - that attempted to define 'who' the Libyan people really were. The act of defining Libyan identity was a exercise in celebratory self-expression, often directed at approving anti-regime audiences in public spaces, but it was also dialogic, consciously addressed to Qadhafi and exposing the reality of the *Jamahiriya* in the process. The most famous variant of this response was in the form of a poem by Faraj al-Mismari:

'Who are you?' Don't you know who we are?
The cause of you and your children's suffering,
You profligate. These are the children of Isa al-Wakwak
Real men who appear in the time of difficulty.
We're the source of your stress, we're the ones who
Mopped up your blood...We are warriors, the cause
Of your destruction, you coward. Brave men, we are not
Rats, and woe betide you if you face us. We are
The people of Barqa...the people of Misrata...the people
Of Nalut...the people of Ar Rujban.³³⁵

The poem continues to list different cities in Libya and to praise their resistance against Qadhafi in principally combative terms, concluding with 'We will keep

³³⁵ "Who are you?" (*man antum*). YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/zc16kp>

fighting until you flee with your children, and we are freed from your tyranny’. This particular poem is only one of many definitional performances during the uprising, but it embodies the two central tenets underpinning the cultural representation of Libyan revolutionary identity in 2011: the unassailable solidarity and unanimity of the Libyan nation, and the pre-eminence of revolutionary warriors (*thuwwar*) within the Libyan political landscape. Although the poem makes reference to the bravery of broader acts of anti-regime defiance, such as public protests, it ultimately elevates a gendered, military connotation of revolutionaries as ‘real men’ (*etrees*) on the battlefield, whose deaths for the opposition’s cause rendered them martyrs (*shuhada*). As indicated in the reference to Isa al-Wakwak, a fighter against the Italian colonisation of Libya, this identity is also presented as historically emergent.

The military struggle against the Qadhafi regime was waged simultaneously across different Libyan cities and regions from March to August 2011; in turn, the exaltation of anti-regime fighters was a recurrent and persistent trope in revolutionary definitional practices. Other ‘Who are you?’ poems draw extensively on the military strength, bravery and tenacity of Libyan fighters,³³⁶ while revolutionary music, in both Arabic and in English, praises Libyan warriors for having ‘weapons at the ready’, for their willingness to die in combat, and for being ‘heroes, who left a life of humiliation... lions in the battlefield... facing mortar guns with bare chests’.³³⁷ The song ‘The Men of Kikla’, sang from the perspective of fighters on the frontline, distinguishes between ‘free Libyans’ (*ahraar*)— a general term encompassing the anti-

³³⁶ See a written English-language version of this poem by Housam Najjair (2013: 139), and an Arabic-language version by Abed Abu-Khamada, originally aired on Libya Al-Ahrar television. Available at: <https://goo.gl/qy3fPY>

³³⁷ Shukri al-Aroosi, “Oh Libya” (*ah ya Leebya*). Available at: <https://goo.gl/dJvQmy>. Other songs that explore similar themes include “Stay Strong, Misrata” (*shiddee al-azem ya Misrata*) by Salah Ghali, “Anthem for a Revolutionary Warrior” (*nasheed lil-mujahid al-leebee*) by Ibn Thabit and “I am a Zintani” (*ana Zintani*), artist unknown. All available at: <https://goo.gl/uL2i44>

Qadhafi popular collective and brave ‘revolutionaries’ (*thuwwar*).³³⁸ A famous song by Asma Saleem, sang from the perspective of civilian bystanders, explicitly equates revolutionary identity with the act of military combat: ‘You revolutionary hero, the one who is standing firm on the frontlines’.³³⁹ The praise of combatants remains consistent regardless of whether song lyrics are addressed towards fighters or issued by them.

The elevation of *thuwwar* centred, not only on their military bravery, but also on their identity as ‘martyrs’ (*shuhada*) in death. As the uprising transitioned into a violent conflict, and the success of the revolutionary project hinged on victory on the battlefield (rather than on any other form of civil disobedience), the two labels were increasingly conflated: *thuwwar* were martyrs and martyrs were assumed to be fighters.³⁴⁰ However, as a marker of identity, ‘martyrdom’ was a much broader term, encompassing all those killed by regime forces. One of the most popular slogans, lyrics and public pronouncements, which emerged at an early stage in the uprising, was ‘the blood of the martyrs won’t go to waste’ (*dam el-shuhada ma yim-sheeh haba*). The Libyan activists I interviewed argued for the significance of the slogan, particularly as it was deployed in the initial weeks of protest. It encapsulated the bravery and self-sacrifice of those who first defied the regime in February 2011: individuals such as Mehdi Zeyo, who used his car to blow up a military base in Benghazi on 20 February 2011, and in doing so ‘transformed’ the course of the uprising, and Mohammed Nabbous, a civilian journalist who closely corresponded with Libyan activists in the diaspora, and who was killed by regime security forces on

³³⁸ “The Men of Kikla” (*rijalat Kikla*). Available at: <https://goo.gl/uL2i44>

³³⁹ Asma Saleem. “You Revolutionary Hero” (*ya thaa’ir ya batal*). Ibid.

³⁴⁰ During the military conflict, songs and slogans referring ‘martyrdom’ were increasingly addressed towards anti-regime fighters as an encouragement to continue military combat. See “The Blood of the Martyrs” (*ya dam al-shuhada*). YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/k1wh4A>

19 March 2011.³⁴¹ The slogan also reminded Libyans of the need to honour the dead by continuing their inspirational struggles for dignity and freedom.³⁴²

The elevation of martyrdom, as a marker of national heroism, was a consistent feature of Libyan revolutionary rhetoric. On Libya Al-Ahrar television channel, presenters and guests alike often commenced their on-air dialogue with a brief statement either ‘praying for mercy on our martyrs’ or ‘greeting the martyrs of the glorious 17 February revolution’: a trend that was reflected consistently in the declarations (*bayanat*) that were issued in support of the uprising by tribes and opposition groups across Libya.³⁴³ The term was also wrapped in highly affective vocabulary and symbolic imagery. The music of the uprising made reference to the tears of ‘the martyr’s mother’ (*umm al-shahid*),³⁴⁴ and Libya Al-Ahrar dedicated its first episode on the programme *Libya’s People* (*Libya al-naas*) to the ‘martyrs of the glorious 17 February revolution’, displaying photographs of young men killed by regime forces, and broadcasting phone calls and contributions from their family members.³⁴⁵ Short video clips showing funerals of those killed by the regime were overlaid with emotive music and used as promos on Libya Al-Ahrar.³⁴⁶

The revolutionary symbolic order, by elevating the identities of ‘martyrs’, was able to position new symbols and sources of collective identity in Libya. In opposition-controlled territories, the images, names and ages of those killed in support of the uprising became familiar to onlookers, populating the streets and revolutionary public spaces, such as media centres, and replacing the former iconography of

³⁴¹ Interview with Hamza, anti-regime demonstrator and civil society activist, 4 April 2015. London.

³⁴² Interview with Maryam, social media activist, 3 February 2015. Skype.

³⁴³ “17 February working committee in Tripoli”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/dHS7Rd>; “Statement of allegiance by youth of Arada”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/yAtk2s>

³⁴⁴ Asma Saleem. “Libya Has Called” (*Leebya naadit*). Available at: <https://goo.gl/mB2JEj>

³⁴⁵ “Martyrs of Freedom” (*shuhada al-hurriya*). YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/UkJ4hK>

³⁴⁶ “Promo: In Sacrifice of the Nation” (*fedaa’an lil-watan*). YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/m4aLMC>; and “Promo: The Blood of the Martyrs will Not Go To Waste” (*dam al-shuhada lan yadee’a haba*). YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/zcpksg>

Qadhafi himself.³⁴⁷ The pervasive presence of such images indicates ‘a significant shift in traditional martyrs’ mythologies: from state or elite constructed national heroes to rather mundane figures, created by popular narratives, who have sacrificed their life for a greater good’ (Zakarevičiūtė 2015: 213). Some of the images were also accompanied by a ‘martyr’s bequest’ (*wasiyyat shahid*): often a line of counsel from the deceased, or a brief statement of their personal hopes and aspirations for Libya. Such bequests were often general in their content, calling for values such as ‘freedom’, or cautioning against disunity in Libya.³⁴⁸ However, they served as a symbolic reminder of the tangible sacrifices made by ordinary Libyans, and of the dignified qualities that such individuals epitomised.

The new Libyan, symbolic order thus constructed and valorised a new, national-revolutionary identity in a number of ways. In cultural productions, plaudits such as bravery, strength, and integrity were applied to all ‘free Libyans’ (*ahraar*) in general. However, martyrs (*shuhada*), occupied a particularly pre-eminent position within this collective unit. In the song ‘No More Lies’, Libya is referred to as ‘the land of martyrs, the land of freedom, of Islam, of all Libyans’.³⁴⁹ Beyond this, cultural productions further demarcated an exclusive category of Libyan revolutionaries (*thuwwar*) whose struggle was defined as military in form and as religiously-legitimate in nature. In practice, there were frequent slippages in this classificatory schema, but the category of *thuwwar* was a particularly distinctive and prominent part of the new revolutionary aesthetic.

The characterisation of Libya as comprised of a free populace and of national heroes - martyrs and fighters - was further bolstered by the reclamation of Libyan

³⁴⁷ Interview with Hamza, anti-regime demonstrator and civil society activist, 4 April 2015. London.

³⁴⁸ Interview with Tareq, social media activist and translator, 14 February 2015. Oxford.

³⁴⁹ FB17. Available at: <https://goo.gl/uL2i44>

narratives of anti-colonial resistance. As argued by Davis (1987: 248), ‘revolutionaries in particular tend to invoke the tradition of glorious revolution, claim to repeat history’. There is always a relevant past for progressive movements to draw upon, even if that past may be cut off at a certain date (Hobsbawm 1988: 1-2). Libyan revolutionaries embarked on a similar undertaking, but only after bypassing the four decades of Qadhafi’s self-styled revolution entirely, although it was saturated with proclamations and narratives of resistance and *jihad*.³⁵⁰ Instead, they presented Libyan fighters as heirs to the struggle of Omar al-Mukhtar, the leader of the resistance to Italian colonisation. Libya is referred to as ‘the land of might, the land of Omar al-Mukhtar’,³⁵¹ and protesters were repeatedly referred to and illustrated as ‘the grandchildren of Omar al-Mukhtar’ and as ‘lions of the desert’.³⁵² Mukhtar’s famous cry ‘We do not surrender, we win or we die’ (*naho la nastaslem nantassir aw namut*) was swiftly transformed into a revolutionary slogan and song in honour of those killed by regime forces.³⁵³ Concurrently, Libyans were also presented as the heirs of local, anti-colonial fighters. Isa al-Wakwak, who is mentioned in the poem by Faraj al-Mismari, was one such figure, but Suleyman al-Baruni, a leader of the resistance in western Tripolitania, and Ramadan al-Suwayhli, in Misurata and eastern Tripolitania, were also praised in revolutionary music.³⁵⁴

Libyans thus contested Qadhafi’s depiction of anti-regime protesters and fighters as ‘rats’ by historicising the 17 February uprising, using anti-colonial narratives. This frame of reference partly resonated with Qadhafi’s own definition and

³⁵⁰ In Qadhafi’s speech on 22 February, he continued to characterise himself as ‘a Bedouin fighter’ and as a *mujahid*.

³⁵¹ FB17. “No More Lies”. Available at: <https://goo.gl/uL2i44>

³⁵² For examples of this in music, see “Libya Has Called” (*Leebya naadit*) by Asma Saleem and ‘My Country is Calling You’ (*blaadee tnaa deekom*) by Shabab Al-Assema. Both available at: <https://goo.gl/uL2i44>. For examples in street art, see Appendix: Figure 14. Soumiea Abushagur

³⁵³ Fitzgerald, Mary. “We win or we die”. *Irish Times*. 19 March 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/U2WExP>

³⁵⁴ Shukri al-Aroosi, ‘Oh Libya’ (*ah ya leebya*). Available at: <https://goo.gl/dJvQmy>

classification of revolutionary worth, but it challenged Qadhafi's ideological appropriation of anti-colonial narratives. In essence, the opposition's rhetoric claimed ownership over the same symbolic terrain occupied by the regime in its construction of an alternative system of revolutionary meaning and value. Thus, while concurring with the argument made by Lisa Wedeen (1999: 12) that authoritarian symbols do not generate 'belief' in the symbols themselves, I would argue that the historical and material referents that Qadhafi's symbols evoked – for instance, that Libya's anticolonial past was imbued with the pursuit of dignity, freedom and revolutionary spirit – were indeed embraced as 'the natural and received shape of the world' in revolutionary texts.

Libyan political identity was thus constructed as historically emergent, and as predicated on strong moral and religious principles. In addition to this, it was also represented as nationalistic in spirit. Through their cultural productions, Libyans signalled their disavowal of the *Jamahiriya*, and proclaimed their political allegiance towards 'Libya' as a national entity. As argued by the journalist Intissar Burawi, 'despite their simplicity, many revolutionary songs have become popular, and have entered people's hearts, because they explicitly reference 'Libya'''.³⁵⁵ Contrary to the dominant mode of artistic expression in the *Jamahiriya*, the revolutionary songs of 2011 do not couch or preface their loyalty to 'Libya' by first professing allegiance to Qadhafi.

Descriptions of 'Libya' in revolutionary texts tend to deploy a near utopian language and imagery. Libya is comprised of 'the best people' and is the 'richest nation',³⁵⁶ a soon to be 'leader among other countries, where no one is deprived of

³⁵⁵ Burawi, Intissar. "The nationalistic song...a missing melody" (*al-nasheed al-watani...nagham mukhtafee*). *Mayadeen*, 2 August 2011. Issue 12: 8.

³⁵⁶ Libyan Crew. "Six Months". Available at: <https://goo.gl/uL2i44>

goodness'.³⁵⁷ Songs make reference to the incomparable beauty of Libya's geography, 'its precious soil' and natural landscape.³⁵⁸ They also articulate and celebrate a Libyan identity that is at once established, with Libyans portrayed as a devout and professional people, 'memorisers of the Qur'an...doctors and engineers',³⁵⁹ and as emergent, with Libyans eager to work towards 'building Libya'.³⁶⁰ This rhetorical construction of a prosperous, cohesive Libyan nation is depicted as hinging only on the fulfilment of the central objective of the uprising: 'The Libyan people are one hundred percent for brotherhood...let's get rid of Muammar and everything will be as smooth as honey'.³⁶¹ Underpinning this vision is an alternative understanding of civic belonging: one in which Libyans can be productive contributors to their country because they are finally represented and invested in its historical narratives: 'record, history of my country – a Libyan will never agree to humiliation'.³⁶²

By foregrounding a dignified, productive Libyan identity, nationalism was constructed as emerging out of a sense of loyalty to the 17 February uprising, and to the collective sacrifices that it had entailed. Although representations of Libyan nationhood were *connected* to historical episodes of anti-colonial resistance, the revolutionary rejection of Qadhafi was ultimately constructed as the watershed point of emergence for this new collective identity: 'We are a nation that is born again...We see in your [Qadhafi's] death the beginning of a beginning',³⁶³ 'Tripoli has changed,

³⁵⁷ "Children of Freedom" (*atfal al-hurriya*). Artist unknown. YouTube. Available at:

<https://goo.gl/GssXKb>

³⁵⁸ Baset El-Hassy. "Oh Benghazi" (*ya benghazi*). YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/AjPJWR>

³⁵⁹ Shabab al-Assema. "My Country is Calling You" (*blaadee tnaa deekom*). Available at:

<https://goo.gl/uL2i44>

³⁶⁰ See the songs "Freedom" (*al-hurriya*) by Shabab al-Assema and "We Have Liberated Libya" (*harrernaha Leebya*) by Mohammed Lowsheesh. Ibid.

³⁶¹ Ibn Thabit. "Anthem for the Libyan Warrior" (*nasheed lil-mujahid al-leebee*). Ibid.

³⁶² "Long Live Benghazi and Beida" (*ashat benghazi wil-beida*). Artist unknown. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/cb3jzB>

³⁶³ "Finally, the Word No" (*akheeran kalimat la*). Artist unknown. Available at: <https://goo.gl/uL2i44>

it's no longer like before';³⁶⁴ 'I've lived in Soug al-Jumua since ages, I never thought people could turn the pages'.³⁶⁵ The terms of national membership were thus defined as 'revolutionary' in nature. The television channel Libya Al-Ahrar, which was presented by its founder Mahmud Shammam as Libya's principal national broadcaster, defined itself as a 'channel for all free people',³⁶⁶ where 'free people' were those who had renounced the Qadhafi regime, and thereby participated in or supported the uprising. Within revolutionary music and poetry, 'Libya' as a national entity was directly implied and rhetorically assembled through the listing of the anti-Qadhafi heroics and military exploits of different cities and territories inside Libya.³⁶⁷

In constructing Libyan nationalism as grounded in a collective opposition to the Qadhafi regime, cultural productions evoke what has been described as the 'palpable, but ideologically nimble' (Hassan and Staggenborg 2015: 346) notion of 'the people' (*al-sha'b*). The song 'We are Libyans' by a group of Benghazi youth amalgamates the identities of the singers with 'you, and all the millions [in Libya]', emphasising their shared revolutionary status.³⁶⁸ A song by the female artist Asma Saleem bolsters this commonality with reference to the homogeneity of Libya's demographic composition, arguing that in Libya there are 'No Amazigh, and no Arabs... we are all Muslims, under a wise leadership'.³⁶⁹ In the song 'Long Live Benghazi and Beida' (*aashat Benghazi wil-Beida*), the artist celebrates the notion that Libyans are 'one family, one voice, one religion - no "religions"'.³⁷⁰ The song 'Libya Has Called' (*Leebya nadit*)

³⁶⁴ Shabab Tarabulus. "I'm a Tripolitanian" (*ana tarabulsi*). Available at: <https://goo.gl/uL2i44>

³⁶⁵ GAB. "Libya is Bleeding". Ibid.

³⁶⁶ "Libya Al-Ahrar: a channel for all free people". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/r1uSKm>

³⁶⁷ "Muhammad al-Fakhiri: Who Are You?" YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/ANJsdr>

³⁶⁸ "We are Libyans." (*nehna leebyeen*). YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/gXCsi4>

³⁶⁹ Asma Saleem. "No Amazigh, No Arabs" (*la amazigh la arab*). Available at: <https://goo.gl/ANJsdr>

³⁷⁰ "Long Live Benghazi and Beida" (*aashat benghazi wil-beida*). Artist unknown. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/cb3jzB>

has the chorus: ‘There is neither East, nor West: the Libyan people are all brothers’.³⁷¹

National unity is thus constructed on the basis of revolutionary homogeneity: a sentiment that pervaded the Libyan opposition’s political discourse in 2011.³⁷²

This Libyan uprising’s alternative classificatory practices were accompanied by a set of historical symbols that again circumvented the *Jamahiriya*, reaching this time for the monarchical period from 1951 to 1969. The 1951 Libyan independence flag permeated the revolutionary public sphere: it was ubiquitous in street graffiti and artwork, was displayed during public demonstrations and protests, and was even worn as a disguise by anti-regime activists in their video statements of solidarity with the uprising. Inside Libya, the presence of the flag’s colours on the outskirts of a city served as a physical marker of its revolutionary allegiance.³⁷³ In Tripoli, covert rebel groups such as the Free Generation Movement sprayed cars with red, black and green dye in order to signal the presence of a revolutionary resistance movement inside the city (Hilsum 2012: 221). In diaspora communities, fundraising organisations such as Hope Relief created their own ‘Libya gear’ – clothing items and accessories embroidered with the 1951 flag – thereby raising money by fulfilling a growing demand for revolutionary merchandise.³⁷⁴ The Libyan-American activist Sara argued that in the east of Libya, where the affiliation with the Senussi monarchy was strongest, the 1951 flag was immensely significant: older generations of Libyans such as her father had retained the flag but kept it concealed in their own homes for

³⁷¹ Asma Saleem. “Libya Has Called” (*Leebya naadit*). Available at: <https://goo.gl/mB2JEj>. A similar line also features in the well-known revolutionary song “Raise up the Star and Crescent” (*ta’alla fil alee ya bu najma wi hilal*). YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/HHfUwz>

³⁷² The NTC had also made the claim that Libya was a fundamentally ‘unified country’ in terms of its demography. See the article: “Federalism: a problem with timing or with the concept?” (*al-fedraliya: mushkela fil tarah am el-tawqeet?*) *Al-Manarah*. 29 July 2011. Issue 6: 3.

³⁷³ Appendix: Figure 15. C.J. Chivers.

³⁷⁴ Interview with Sara, Libyan-American activist, 24 March 2015. Tunisia.

decades.³⁷⁵ LYM's Ahmed, however, argued that the compulsive display of the flag was less about what it stood for than it was a statement about the symbol it replaced:

Carrying the new flag meant this new thing that I don't think we ever had before. It meant finally being Libyan. Holding the green flag was representing Qadhafi. Talk about Libya meant talking about Qadhafi... We never really had the chance to bond with our nation or feel love for it. The revolution changed that.³⁷⁶

In this understanding, the Libyan flag was a powerful symbol because it represented a severance from the imposition of Qadhafi's identity onto Libya. Where the green flag was intimately associated with the *Jamahiriya* (and indeed, was often treated as source of mockery by outsiders),³⁷⁷ the new flag was free of such associations. The Benghazi activist Haleema argued that the flag was in some ways a strange choice for reflecting revolutionary consensus: despite the fact that it was jubilantly celebrated, and 'even sometimes abused by Libyans who painted it on inappropriate places like historic monuments...not everyone agreed with what it stood for politically. A lot of people didn't actually like the monarchy, or didn't want it to return'.³⁷⁸ I would argue that the new revolutionary aesthetic reconciled this tension by freeing the flag of its tangible monarchical connotations, drawing instead on its polysemy as a symbol of Islam by referring to it as 'the star and crescent' (*najma wa hilal*), and deploying it as a symbol of Libya's proclamation of independence in 1951. Such sentiments are explicitly linked in the revolutionary anthem 'Raise up the Star and Crescent' (*ta'alla*

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Interview with Ahmed, social media activist, 25 February 2015. London.

³⁷⁷ Interview with Tareq, social media activist and translator, 14 February 2015. Oxford.

³⁷⁸ Interview with Haleema, civil society activist in Benghazi, 29 March 2015. Tunisia.

bil najma wa hilal), where the act of raising the flag signifies, not commitment to the monarchy, but ‘repeating the happiness of our independence’.³⁷⁹

Similarly, poetry that was dedicated to praising the ‘star and crescent’ did not allude to the monarchy or to King Idris I but focused on the sacrifices that underpinned the raising of the flag: the flag was only held up ‘thanks to the men whose blood was spilt’.³⁸⁰ This ambivalence was echoed in the broader political rhetoric of the Libyan opposition, in which mentions of the Kingdom of Libya were restricted to praise of its provision of social welfare, and were qualified by the recognition that ‘it wasn’t a perfect system by any means’.³⁸¹ The 1951 flag, and the rhetoric of independence that it evoked, thus easily accompanied a revolutionary-centric system of meaning that emphasised ideals such as freedom, but without directly implying the polarising political history of the monarchy. For similar reasons, the 1951 national anthem, which was simultaneously devoid of institutionally political meaning and inclusive of broad political aspirations such as ‘freedom’, served as a useful signifier in revolutionary cultural productions. Its words, which were sang in demonstrations and painted in street art, resonated strongly with the Libyan uprising’s revolutionary aspirations: ‘We will never return to the chains, we have freed ourselves and freed our land’.³⁸²

Thus far, I have argued that the new system of revolutionary meaning valorised the identities of free Libyans (*ahraar*), martyrs (*shuhada*) and revolutionary fighters (*thuwwar*) above all, and emphasised that the new revolutionary collective was politically homogenous and civically conscientious. This is not to suggest that there

³⁷⁹ “Raise up the Star and Crescent” (*ta’alla fil alee ya bu najma wi hilal*). YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/HHfUwz>

³⁸⁰ “Raise up the Star and Crescent”. Al-Manarah Media. 6 May 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/AzFnV3>

³⁸¹ “*Bil-Leebee programme: Orchestrated Fear*”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/59Jaes>

³⁸² Appendix: Figure 16. Soumiea Abushagur.

were no alternative conceptualisations of Libyan political identity in the revolutionary cultural sphere. For instance, some cultural productions can be read as the expression of a female gendered publically political self. A poem that was publically performed at the Benghazi courthouse by the female activist Gadhira al-Shehebi, from the city of Derna, drew particular emphasis to the role of women in the uprising: ‘free, young and old, protecting the revolution by protesting in the squares’.³⁸³ A women’s demonstration in Benghazi on 27 March 2011 in solidarity with Iman Obeidi, a Libyan lawyer from the city who publically accused Qadhafi’s militias of rape and assault, was populated with a slogan that had hitherto been associated with male-led demonstrations: ‘With our souls and blood, we will sacrifice for you, Iman’.³⁸⁴ This sentiment was also mirrored in the statement of revolutionary allegiance issued by a group of female activists inside Tripoli, which begins by addressing itself to ‘the women who were raped by the regime’s forces’, and apologises ‘because we haven’t been able to avenge them’.³⁸⁵ The ‘we’ here refers to the women themselves, and not to the male revolutionaries customarily entrusted with that task.

Nevertheless, it remains the case that even gendered discourses re-inscribe the revolutionary system of meaning outline above. They do this partly by affirming the Libyan collective as overwhelmingly homogenous in its revolutionary composition, but also by continuing to assert the pre-eminence of male combatants in the new Libyan nation. For instance, al-Shehebi introduces herself as the ‘free daughter and sister of *thuwwar*’, and the group of Tripoli women describe their statement of allegiance as issued by ‘free women’, and as signifying a ‘humble effort in support of the *thuwwar* on the frontlines’. Revolutionary songs that centre on women

³⁸³ “Who are you?” YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/A8RD18>

³⁸⁴ “A women’s demonstration in solidarity with Iman”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/w7qH2J>

³⁸⁵ “Statement by Free Women of Soug Al-Juma”. YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/faUv7G>

characterise their worth in terms of their relationship to male fighters: ‘Be proud to be a Libyan woman; you have young brothers who fear neither death nor torture’.³⁸⁶ The slogans issued by demonstrators in women-only demonstrations in the city of Jadu invoke the uprising’s overarching definition of pride and freedom as dependent on allegiance to the uprising, but they similarly indicate the distinction between different forms of contentious activism: ‘We are free Libyan women, hand in hand with the *thuwwar*’; ‘tell Muammar and his children, there are men in Jadu’.³⁸⁷

7.4 Material Manifestations of the 17 February Symbolic Order

New symbolic systems of meaning are politically transformative, and speak more to agency, when they are grounded in tangible restructurings of the material sphere (Friedland and Alford 1991). Although the symbolism of the uprising was tinged with utopian imagery and rhetoric, the notion that the revolutionary moment had created something novel – empowering collectivities, organisational networks and ultimately, a new mode of civic belonging – continues to be asserted by a wide range of activists who participated within it. In particular, in characterising what made the uprising a radical, euphoric moment, activists reference the emergence of a sense of collective social responsibility. The UK-based activist and doctor Najib argued that it was the ‘display of initiative’ – evident not only in the first demonstrations, but also in the establishment of fundraising organisations, the supply of hospital equipment and medication, and the travel of diaspora doctors to the country – that suggested that Libyans had ‘changed their mentality’ of non-productivity, and abandoned their

³⁸⁶ Salah Ghali. “Be proud to be a Libyan woman” (*iftikhri annnek libiya*). Available at: <https://goo.gl/ANJsdr>

³⁸⁷ “Protest by the women’s movement in Jadu”. YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSZwJydEjiM>

former political suspicions of each other. Abdullah, an activist based in the city of Zawiya, elaborated upon this point:

Those were the days of real community. The liberation of Zawiya in August was an incredible event. I headed the Relief Committee during the month of Ramadan at Abu Huraira Mosque, and people just opened their doors to the *thuwwar*, helping with food and provisions, giving whatever they could give. We raised 3000 dinars in half an hour, 25,000 dinars within one week. Youth from Zawiya just came and helped, with no incentives and interests other than helping their city. That sense of community was what got us through the difficult month of Ramadan.³⁸⁸

Radical revolutionary moments, according to Tarrow (1993: 302), demonstrate and engender both ‘utopian dreams’ and ‘intoxicating solidarity’ among participants. In the Libyan uprising, the solidarity that was felt by activists emerged from palpable instances of collective generosity, selflessness and sacrifice. Tareq witnessed this both in the diaspora and inside Libya. Among online activist communities, there was ‘a real sense of camaraderie...and there was emotional and spiritual support’, based on the shared experience of being invested in the uprising while observing it from the outside. In Libya, he experienced a relentless spirit of assistance between revolutionary fighters, activists, and journalists. He first experienced the latter upon immediately arriving at Tunisia in July 2011, when his group was driven 200km across the border by two Libyan strangers, simply so that they could be seen safely inside opposition-controlled territory.³⁸⁹

The NTC coordinator Yahya argued that the principal ‘good’ that came out of the uprising was largely of a social nature: ‘families came together, communities

³⁸⁸ Interview with Abdullah, 28 March 2015. Tunisia.

³⁸⁹ Interview with Tareq, social media activist and translator, 14 February 2015. Oxford.

came together. Everyone was cooperating. There was a lot of positivity'.³⁹⁰ Inside regime-controlled Tripoli, the shared experience of surveillance, imprisonment and violence led to the creation of 'extraordinary' revolutionary bonds among fighters in the city.³⁹¹ The president of the New Libya Foundation (NLF) Rihab Elhaj argued that these acts of assistance created a 'new and special bond between Libyans', and were one indication of the way in which 'the revolution gave birth to Libyan civil society' (Rajabany and Shitrit 2014: 84). This spirit of social camaraderie and civic responsibility was particularly amplified in Benghazi, which saw the emergence of an extensive civil society sphere from March 2011 onwards (ibid: 95). The journalist and activist Dania describes this locus of activity as centred in and around the Benghazi Courthouse, which was comprised of a highly productive network of people:

Everyone there that I met was so focused on working together to achieve something. And seeing these young men who were going to the frontlines, and all these people who were volunteering to take food...it was just an incredible energy and excitement, and a real sense of 'we can do anything now'. It was amazing, the best time ever. I saw the best in people; I saw the best of Libya.³⁹²

In Benghazi, this productive capacity was displayed in the kinds of generous acts that were performed by Libyans throughout the country: 'people were doing things off their own backs; people were selfless. Bakeries were opening and bread was being given for free, people were printing things for free'.³⁹³ However, civic activism was particularly powerful in Benghazi because it occurred within a relatively intimate,

³⁹⁰ Interview with Yahya, activist and NTC coordinator, 29 November 2016. Skype.

³⁹¹ Interview with Ali, rebel coordinator and fighter in Tripoli, 9 February 2015. Skype.

³⁹² Interview with Dania, Benghazi-based journalist and campaigner, 27 August 2015. London.

³⁹³ Interview with Hamza, anti-regime demonstrator and civil society activist, 4 April 2015. London.

highly symbolic site of protest that was the origin of the first protests on 15 February: the Benghazi Courthouse. After the fall of the regime's Al-Fadeel battalion on 20 February, the Courthouse became a hub of civic and political activity. During the daytime, the area surrounding the Courthouse was teeming with groups of youth organising social action campaigns, 'sending positive messages on how to improve Benghazi together...they were out on the streets, picking up garbage and handing out flyers, telling people to look after the cleanliness of the city, because it now belonged to us'.³⁹⁴

Different organisations also established their own private tents around the Courthouse, in which they sought to disseminate what they felt to be key revolutionary messages and new modes of civic existence within Libya. The Libyan police force had a tent manned by activists, in which 'they tried to break the barrier in people's minds, that the police are linked to the regime', and to replace it with the new notion that the police were now an instrument for the protection of the people.³⁹⁵ The Department of Law at the University of Benghazi established a tent in which members of the faculty gave daily lectures on the subject of civil society within a democratic society.³⁹⁶ This new mode of activism was not only voluntary and collaborative, but was also premised on the reconfiguration of established understandings of citizenship within Libyan society.

Across Libya, civic activism also involved the transformation of spaces that were deliberately neglected or appropriated by the Qadhafi regime (Al-Turk 2011: 120). In Benghazi, activists took over the once-feared 'congregation spaces' (*mathabat*) used by Qadhafi's revolutionary committees, transforming them into

³⁹⁴ Interview with Marwa, civil society activist in Benghazi, 23 January 2016. London.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Interview with Hamza, anti-regime demonstrator and civil society activist, 4 April 2015. London.

communal spaces, largely for women, that were used for a diverse array of cultural activities, from spiritual gatherings to the teaching of the English language (formerly demonized by Qadhafi for its association with the West).³⁹⁷ In other opposition-controlled towns such as Shahhat, street clean-up operations took the form of well-organised campaigns that emphasised the cultural, archaeological and aesthetic preservation of the city's Greek ruins for future tourism purposes: again, something that Qadhafi had actively discouraged.³⁹⁸ In Tripoli, social action projects emerged immediately following the liberation of the city, with clean-up campaigns, the distribution of water, the formation of organic committees to mediate disputes, and initiatives by emerging civil society groups to stop gunmen from firing into the air (El-Khawas 2013: 76).

The transformation of public spaces has been described as an important, symbolic form of open resistance: because such spaces customarily serve as 'the repositories and the projections of power', re-appropriation severs the populace's former compliance with the many regularities and terms that had governed their lives (Tripp 2013: 73). Going beyond this interpretation, and in line with an institutional perspective, the practical reconstruction of the relationship between citizens and their external environment also strengthens the salience of the new systems of meaning that emerge during open resistance. If the 'categorical reconstruction' of meanings can facilitate changes in practice, then changes in practice can also strengthen a system of meaning (Friedland and Alford 1991: 246). Jessica Winegar (2016: 610-611) has argued that such 'acts of aesthetic ordering' enabled people to model the kind of state they wanted: 'a modern-socialist ideal of a state that takes care of all its citizens and

³⁹⁷ Interview with Haleema, civil society activist in Benghazi, 29 March 2015. Tunisia.

³⁹⁸ "Cleaning Campaigns in the City of Shahhat – Libya Al-Ahrar". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/jAc4aQ>

provides public amenities'. In line with this view, such acts of aesthetic ordering during the Libyan uprising served both as a denunciation of the *Jamahiriya*'s failure to provide high standards of social living, and an early demonstration of a utopian vision of the Libyan state, in which Libyans would never again be deprived of material prosperity. The beautification of public spaces reflects the historicised cleavage between the political past and present of the Libyan nation: instructions to remove garbage, using slogans such as 'keep your city clean,' accompanied artistic depictions of Qadhafi being consigned to the 'garbage of history' (Joffe 2016: 134).

In addition to modelling an ideal state, the regulation of public spaces and behaviours also enacts the revolutionary idealisation of Libyan society as empowered, productive and socially conscientious. In this vein, Khalil (2014: 102) has characterised the reclamation of public spaces as one part of the process of 'self-governance' that was a common trait among the political crowds of 2011. Practical attempts at 'self-governance', such as the organisation of neighbourhood security, street cleaning and medical care, affirm the claim that the popular voice of Arab crowds has now become a potent source of political authority, but also the notion that responsibility and accountability accompany power.

The celebrated ethos of social responsibility underpinning these acts is problematised by Winegar (2016: 616), who argues that, in the case of Egypt, such civilising discourses and regulatory behaviours were condescending towards the poor and working classes: for instance, in propounding 'the notion that one should actually do work for the pittance of a government salary'. However, such behaviours must also be understood as a commentary on the social relations established by authoritarian regimes: in this instance, on the way in which the *Jamahiriya* engendered popular complicity in its coercive apparatus, and implicated the populace in its public

institutions. The emphasis on individual and collective responsibility can be seen as an attempt to assert agency over one's own environment, but also to assert a sense of self-worth that had been undermined due to participation in the *Jamahiriyah's* disorderly and duplicitous public sphere. One activist emphasised that 'Qadhafi's mentality' had formerly governed public life, referencing the well-known revolutionary saying that Libyans must 'get rid of the small Qadhafi inside of them' as the first step to social change.³⁹⁹ The popular claim that revolutionary social change will only occur if people 'begin with' themselves (Winegar 2016: 616) is thus a reflection of the way in which self-understandings are intimately connected to the regulatory practices of authoritarian regimes.

The transformation of public spaces, and the reconfiguration of the behaviours that formerly populated them, was an effort that was undertaken at both an individual and a collective level. Where organised revolutionary bodies established street clean-up operations, other activists sought to quietly implement more 'personal convictions', such as a refusal to continue finding employment using nepotism or 'connections' (*wasta*) instead of through one's own professional merits.⁴⁰⁰ Such acts were fuelled by a sense of new national belonging that was bound, in particular, by the revolutionary discourse of sacrifice: 'Libya wasn't something owned by Qadhafi anymore. People died for it, so we needed to be responsible for it'.⁴⁰¹ Above all, they represented attempts to put into practice the uprising's symbolic order, with its suggestion of a unified and productive revolutionary collective, and a correspondingly beneficent Libyan state. In celebrating the progress of civil society during the uprising, a column in *Al-Manārah* newspaper compares the way in which 'we were in

³⁹⁹ Interview with Aisha, women's rights activist, 6 April 2016. Skype.

⁴⁰⁰ Interview with Mohammed, revolutionary fighter and civil society activist in Tripoli, 23 March 2015. Tunisia.

⁴⁰¹ Interview with Haleema, civil society activist in Benghazi, 29 March 2015. Tunisia.

the past stripped of our will' with 'what our revolution has now achieved'.⁴⁰² The emergence of agency is here explicitly connected to Libyans' palpable transformation of their material landscape.

7.5 Dynamics of Domination in the Revolutionary Symbolic Order

Hitherto, this chapter has argued that revolutionary cultural productions and practices contested the *Jamahiriya*'s symbolic order and attempted to establish alternative notions of being, belonging and behaving in a post-Qadhafi Libya. To some extent, there was a degree of discursive overlap between existent authoritarian and new revolutionary vocabularies: for instance, both relied extensively on concepts such as freedom, martyrdom and prosperity, and laid claim to similar historical narratives of anti-colonial struggle. This can be partly attributed to the polysemy of culturally resonant symbols, which are always subject to competing interpretations (Wedeen 1999: 10). However, oppositional discourses can risk mirroring, not only the vocabularies of power, but also the very structures of dominance that underpin them. As argued by Tripp (2013: 12), 'resistance, in shadowing power, also takes on some of its qualities, similarly dividing the world into binary opposites'. The following discussion will outline how and why binary divisions emerged within the revolutionary symbolic order, and will explore the implications of such divisions for the transformation of the *Jamahiriya*'s system of meaning, and for the emergence of political agency during the uprising more generally.

The symbolic order of the 17 February uprising, in common with the institutional system of meaning it sought to depose, symbolically constituted and

⁴⁰² al-Ajnaf, Alaa. "A letter to the dear reader" (*resala li azizi al-qari*). *Al-Manarah*. 5 August 2011. Issue 7: 10.

defended an alternative definition of power and interest in the new Libya. This is implicit in the discussion within the previous section, which drew attention to the way in which revolutionary rhetoric elevated free Libyans, martyrs and anti-regime fighters in the revolutionary aesthetic. The counterpart to this affirmative definition of value and power is the symbolic exclusion of non-revolutionaries – who were represented as Qadhafi supporters - from the new Libyan collective. Rap songs such as ‘I’m a Tripolitanian’ (*ana tarabulsi*) attack not only the fighters who aligned with Qadhafi, but also those who sided with him politically, dismissing the claim that they acquiesced out of fear: ‘look at those hypocrites, those traitors, those cowards: the Libyan people have called them “climbers.”’⁴⁰³ In ‘I won’t forgive’ (*mish han-sameh*) by Shukri al-Aroosi, the lyrics also attack the ‘climbers’ (*mutasaleqeen*) who will attempt to enter the revolutionary fold after the toppling of the regime: ‘the nation isn’t gullible, and won’t forget your treachery’.⁴⁰⁴ Another song by the same singer displays contempt for the dubious religious morals of those who ‘sold you, my country, for a cheap price, and bought a life of shame with Muammar’.⁴⁰⁵

The conversational rhetoric that emerged during the uprising bolstered this distinction between pro and anti-regime Libyans. It constructed an identity, not only for ‘revolutionaries’, but also for Qadhafi’s swarm of green supporters, who were referred to ‘algae’ (*tahalib*, singular *tuhloob*). This pejorative term was vague and indiscriminate in its use, referring variously to pro-Qadhafi fighters, civilians supportive of his rule and even those sceptical of the NATO military intervention. The Tripoli-based activist Osama argued that, for all its comic undertones, the term was used in an attacking way:

⁴⁰³ Shabab Tarabulus. “I’m a Tripolitanian” (*ana tarabulsi*). Available at: <https://goo.gl/mB2JEj>

⁴⁰⁴ Shukri al-Aroosi. “I Won’t Forgive” (*mish hansameh*). Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Shukri al-Aroosi, “Oh Libya” (*ah ya leebya*). Available at: <https://goo.gl/dJvQmy>

At the start I supported the calls for political reform, but I was against the military aspect of the revolution, and then I was against the NATO intervention...I didn't trust the return of political exiles...Of course, people called me a *tuhloob*, as though I was chanting and dancing for Qadhafi outside Bab al-Aziziyah! During and after the revolution, being labelled a *tuhloob* was a serious accusation.⁴⁰⁶

The binary distinction between Qadhafi supporters and revolutionaries was bolstered by the kind of collectivist revolutionary rhetoric delineated in the previous section, which suggested that 'during the revolution, all of Libyan society, except for Qaddafi's few supporters, came together to overthrow the dictator' (Khalil 2014: 117). At the time, and for activists present on social media in particular, the distinction between revolutionaries and non-revolutionaries was not problematic precisely because the latter were viewed as insubstantial in number. Activists denied that the uprising was a 'civil war'.⁴⁰⁷ Mezran and Knecht (2015: 98) contest this presentation of the uprising, arguing that 'the opposition's propaganda concealed the fact that the revolution was indeed a "civil war": Libyans fought against Libyans'. For Housam, the ceaseless repetition and celebration of the term *thuwwar* within Libyan cultural productions meant that many Libyans failed to grasp the complicated political reality of the war in Libya in 2011, which did involve conflicts between pro and anti-Qadhafi people.⁴⁰⁸ Similarly, the exiled dissident Fayez criticised the notion that the uprising was a unified, mass movement with only a smattering of pro-Qadhafi supporters, arguing for the need to break down the 'revolution' into concrete figures:

⁴⁰⁶ Interview with Osama, reformist anti-regime demonstrator in Tripoli, 30 December 2015. Skype.

⁴⁰⁷ Interview with Tareq, social media activist and translator, 14 February 2015. Oxford.

⁴⁰⁸ Interview with Osama, reformist anti-regime demonstrator in Tripoli, 30 December 2015. Skype.

The revolution in Libya was carried out by 50 to 60 thousand people, at most. The people who were killed were between 25 and 30 thousand. Fighters in Benghazi succeeded only because of air cover. Inside Tripoli, there were pockets of resistance and fighting, but most people actually just watched to see what would happen.⁴⁰⁹

The inadequacy of terms such as ‘revolution’ (*thawra*) and ‘revolutionaries’ (*thuwwar*) in capturing the political and military reality of Libya suggests, similarly, the inability of such terms to be inclusive of a substantial proportion of the Libyan populace. According to the activist Reem, who was present in Tripoli during the uprising, such terms proliferated because it was all too easy to assume that all Libyans privately supported the uprising if one was confined to ‘revolutionary bubbles’ and enclosed social circles. In reality, people held a range of positions in relation to the uprising, from complete support to complete rejection, even within her own neighbourhood. Peaceful coexistence within their community was only possible when they ignored the political binary established by both the regime and the opposition.⁴¹⁰

It has been argued that revolutionary discourses exclude as well as emphasise, and that this might mean ‘the sidelining, if not outright prevention, of certain ways of defining a revolution or continuing political action’ (Winegar 2016: 617). The revolutionary system of meaning actively excluded, not only by supplying sweeping labels for, and condemnations of, those who did not support the revolution, but also by failing to acknowledge the presence of different ways of defining opposition to the Qadhafi regime. As argued by Valocchi (2005b: 752), ‘categories exert power over individuals, especially for those who do not fit neatly within their normative alignments’. Revolutionary meaning was strikingly uniform and normative in the way

⁴⁰⁹ Interview with Fayez, exiled anti-regime dissident, 27 January 2016.

⁴¹⁰ Interview with Reem, women’s rights activist in Tripoli, 15 March 2015. Skype.

in which it associated freedom with support for the NATO-backed military struggle against the regime. The Libyan activist Mohammed Ismail argued that this had an alienating effect on some activists:

Once NATO got involved, even some people who were anti-Qadhafi sat on the fence...they changed their stance because they didn't want a foreign nation bombing their country. But they were always brutally shut down, or accused of being against the revolution. I for one faced that.⁴¹¹

On a similar note, Salem, who demonstrated against the regime in Tripoli, argued that after the first few days of protests in the city, some of the youth reconsidered their support for the uprising because of what they felt to be an exaggerated media drive towards toppling the regime, led in particular by external political actors. This retreat from the uprising escalated following the widespread calls for international intervention: 'some young guys started to turn against the revolution completely at that point, saying things like "it's not about Muammar, put him to one side, he's just a symbol: it's about protecting Libya."'⁴¹² However, they were in turn categorised as *tahalib* during the months of conflict: a label that persisted following the collapse of the Qadhafi regime. The Zawiya-based lawyer Khaled argued that the rhetoric of jihad against Qadhafi also failed to take into account the fact that many of those who were fighting for the regime were forced to do so against their will.⁴¹³ By failing to accommodate or even acknowledge alternative perspectives on the military conflict in Libya, the revolutionary aesthetic oversimplified political agency, presenting support for the uprising as politically self-evident and fundamentally uncomplicated.

⁴¹¹ Interview with Umar, journalist and photographer, 14 January 2016. Skype.

⁴¹² Interview with Salem, former economic analyst and anti-regime demonstrator, 10 December 2016. Birmingham.

⁴¹³ Interview with Khaled, pro-opposition lawyer in Zawiya, 26 March 2015. Tunisia.

The Libyan uprising's dichotomy between regime loyalists and free revolutionaries led to the detraction of the voices and identities of those who did not share in its narrative of freedom, in terms that closely mirrored the very institutional order it set out to subvert. Bushra, a member of the human-rights organisation Lawyers for Justice in Libya (LFJL), argued that the condemnation of Qadhafi supporters, and acts of reprisal against them, were based not only on crimes committed, but also on opinions held.⁴¹⁴ The policing of Libyans' political opinions began during the revolutionary period itself, and was initially evident in reactions to people's embrace (or rejection) of the symbolism of 17 February. In cities that were controlled by the opposition, shop shutters that remained painted green – in accordance with former *Jamahiriya* law – were often vandalised or scrawled with graffiti instructing the owners to 'change the colour'.⁴¹⁵ In Tripoli, some storeowners used portraits of Qadhafi as doormats (the act of showing one's feet is considered an offensive gesture in the Middle East). As a result, the symbolic rejection of Qadhafi, by stepping on his image, became a precondition for those seeking to undertake social and material transactions, and led to the severance of social ties among neighbours who had been accustomed to entering each others' stores for many years.⁴¹⁶

Mohammed-Hejajy, a training coordinator at the Libya Youth Centre (LYC) in Tripoli, which was established towards the end of 2011, argued that being branded a Qadhafi supporter diminished one's own standing in society. As a result, the Centre's social entrepreneurship programmes for young people hinged on breaking down the assumption that *thuwwar* intrinsically had a superior status to those who did not participate in the uprising. In order to destabilise this hierarchy, the Centre dispensed

⁴¹⁴ Interview with Bushra, Libyan lawyer, 4 March 2015. London.

⁴¹⁵ Interview with Aisha, women's rights activist, 6 April 2016. Skype.

⁴¹⁶ Interview with Tareq, social media activist and translator, 14 February 2015. Oxford.

with the term ‘revolution’ altogether, replacing it instead with more politically impartial and inclusive terminology such as ‘the period of war’ (*fatrat al-harb*) or ‘the events’ (*al-ahdath*), and first constructing a sense of social belonging around the LYC itself before moving onto more contentious subjects such as ‘the nation’.⁴¹⁷ The neutralising rhetoric of the LYC suggests the way in which revolutionary categorisations did not inscribe, but instead actively undercut, the utopian discourse of national unity that was celebrated by revolutionary cultural productions.

The exclusionary dimensions of the revolutionary symbolic order also suggest the need to recognise the way in which distinction-making practices are not collectively empowering or counter-hegemonic in and of themselves, but ultimately reflect and exemplify the interests of those undertaking them. This is visible, not only in the content of the 17 February symbolic order, but also in the way in which its classificatory practices shaped the material sphere in 2011. As noted in the previous section, the way in which power is materially structured is intimately connected to the way in which power is defined; in turn, symbolism engenders specific material practices by creating a ‘highly contingent set of social norms’ that delineates and sanctions appropriate modes of action (Thornton and Ocasio 2008: 106). Although the symbolism of the uprising attempted to sanction a new model of citizenship based on values such as productivity, individual responsibility and social altruism, it also engendered hierarchical modes of action that were closely connected to the exaltation of *thuwwar* in the new revolutionary collective.

The categorisation of *thuwwar* as religious combatants and martyrs was a definition that led to the practical marginalisation of those who were killed or went missing while supporting the Qadhafi regime, or even those whose allegiance to the

⁴¹⁷ Interview with Mohammed, revolutionary fighter and civil society activist in Tripoli, 23 March 2015. Tunisia.

17 February uprising was unknown. Libya's defence minister, Abdul Fattah Younes, supported the excommunication of pro-Qadhafi fighters, describing them as 'unbelievers who killed women and children and men, and destroyed cities and agriculture...because of this, they are apostates...and for this reason, this is a battle for martyrdom'.⁴¹⁸ Popular protest slogans and dictums such as 'the blood of the martyrs will not go to waste' indicated a classificatory monopoly to determine whose deaths were significant and worthy of being dignified with recognition. Consequently, the concept of 'martyrdom' foregrounded a particular type of dignity that was contingent on political beliefs and actions, rather than on what has been described as the Arab Spring's expression of a 'more global culture of emotion, arising from "basal emotions" relating to human value and worth' (Fierke 2015: 45). According to the Libyan lawyer Bushra Saudi, this definitional practice was accompanied by significant social, political and legal ramifications:

In 2011, the very first understanding of revolution was spontaneous and empowering, but that changed...the revolution became problematic for the voice of the other in Libya, whatever that "other" might be. The idea of revolutionary legitimacy was soon hijacked in Libya in 2011, meaning that if you were with us, you were with us, and if you weren't with us, you were either quiet or you were dead.⁴¹⁹

In practice, the notion of revolutionary legitimacy paved the way for the transformation of 'martyrdom' into a legal category, which in turn served as a prohibitive barrier to social reconciliation and to the implementation of any serious form of transitional justice. Humanitarian organisations that emerged in different cities during and after the uprising, such as ministries for the 'Martyrs and Missing',

⁴¹⁸ "The Martyr Abdul Fattah Younes". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/afcN3s>

⁴¹⁹ Interview with Bushra, Libyan lawyer, 4 March 2015. London.

would only concern themselves with pro-revolutionary casualties. Because the individual rights of Libyans were not tied to the legality of their actions, but to their position within the revolutionary binary, the deaths and disappearances of suspected pro-Qadhafi supporters were not worthy of investigation. The Tripoli-based women's activist Sahar al-Naas argued that the opposite was also true: violations committed by *thuwwar* were deemed inconsequential because anti-Qadhafi fighters were the rightful power-holders in the 17 February uprising. Thus, organisations that were established in the immediate aftermath of the uprising, such as 'The Alliance of Loyalty to Blood of the Martyrs' (*kutlat al-wafa le-dam al-shuhada*) both absolved *thuwwar* of any crimes committed against pro-Qadhafi forces, and suggested that *thuwwar* (including individuals who were imprisoned for many years under Qadhafi) were those most fit to lead in Libya, irrespective of their capacity of their do so.⁴²⁰

In an article on 'martyrdom' as an actively performed rhetorical position in the Egyptian uprising, Walter Armbrust (2013) emphasises its capacity for enabling the expression of radical revolutionary meanings, such as the rethinking of the place of women in society. In the Libyan uprising, the rhetoric of martyrdom was radical in that it enabled protesters to demand accountability and dignity for those whom Qadhafi had dehumanised and labelled as inconsequential 'rats'. However, it also helped to re-establish a symbolic hierarchy that shaped the way in which political and material interests were systematically pursued in Libya, even at the expense of broader revolutionary ideas such as justice and human dignity. Mohammed-Hejjajy, who travelled from Tripoli to fight in both Misrata and Sirte, argued that many fighters clung on to their identity as *thuwwar* because it gave them a stake in post-

⁴²⁰ Interview with Yasmin, women's rights activist, 11 March 2011. Exeter.

Qadhafi Libya. This was most noticeable in their physical, and even emotional attachment to their weapons:

From the youth that I knew, I was one of the very few who actually gave my weapon after the fighting stopped, and that took a very long time. But you have to understand why a lot of youth didn't want to give up their weapons. Jobs just don't provide enough money in Libya. For the young men I knew, being a fighter meant power, it gave you opportunities.⁴²¹

The 'power' that came with being a fighter was symbolically defined and defended in the rhetoric of the uprising, and consequently led to the instatement of a dangerous, potentially unchecked source of coercive authority. Dirk Vandewalle has argued that the emphasis on revolutionary legitimacy fuelled a rhetoric of 'retribution' against non-*thuwwar* which could in fact be used to target 'virtually everyone' depending on the way in which association with Qadhafi was defined, because of the fact that most people were variously implicated within the *Jamahiriya*'s political, institutional system.⁴²² This point was underscored by the Tripoli-based activist Osama, who argued that, immediately after the routing of Qadhafi from the capital, identifying as one of the *thuwwar* (and having the ability to label others *tahalib*) was a marker of social and political status that could subsequently be used to settle private quarrels, and was even deployed for personal gain, in a reversal of the way in which reporting others for being 'rats' during the *Jamahiriya* was notoriously deployed for retributory purposes.⁴²³ This suggests that what have been described as 'the rules of the game, the means-ends relationships by which power and status are gained, maintained and lost'

⁴²¹ Interview with Mohammed, revolutionary fighter and civil society activist in Tripoli, 23 March 2015. Tunisia.

⁴²² Kirpatrick, David D. and C.J. Chivers. "Tribal rifts threaten to undermine Libya uprising". *The New York Times*. 13 August 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/YkrLcp>

⁴²³ Interview with Osama, reformist anti-regime demonstrator in Tripoli, 30 December 2015. Skype.

(Thornton and Ocasio 2008: 112) in the *Jamahiriya* were, through the emergence of this particular mode of action, reversed rather than overturned.

The uprising's reification of the *thuwwar* was also concomitant with an absence of accountability for revolutionary fighters, and a willingness to overlook human rights violations conducted by anti-regime forces during the military conflict in 2011. After a two-day battle on 10-11 August, military forces from the city of Misurata occupied the pro-Qadhafi town of Tawergha and began expelling its 20,000, mainly black inhabitants. They defended the expulsion principally with reference to the large number of rapes committed by loyalist units in Misurata (Tabib 2014: 4), or what one prominent social media activist described as 'intensely pro-Gaddafi fighters who raped, kidnapped & murdered Misuratans'.⁴²⁴ Houses, shops and the local hospital were vandalised, looted and set on fire, and Tawerghans continued to be detained by fighters at checkpoints, hospitals and on the streets in the following weeks.⁴²⁵ Having undertaken what they described as the liberation (*tahreer*) of the town on 11 August,⁴²⁶ Misuratan military commanders declared that 'Tawergha no longer exists' and insisted that Tawerghans would never be permitted to return to the town.⁴²⁷

The political violence and ethnic cleansing that occurred in Tawergha was largely explained away or ignored during the uprising. The expulsion of the Tawergha was recognised as a point of 'discomfort' for many activists, but one that couldn't be adequately addressed in the revolutionary media because of the moral authority that Misuratan fighters had earned after months of struggle against the regime.⁴²⁸ Consequently, and because 'the deployment of material resources not only involves

⁴²⁴ @rima_misurata, 17 August 2011, 6.40pm; 6.41pm. Tweet.

⁴²⁵ Gilligan, Andrew. "Gaddafi's ghost town after the loyalists retreat". *The Telegraph*. 11 September 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/unNTT9>

⁴²⁶ "The Battle for the Liberation of Tawergha". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/C3xGey>

⁴²⁷ Gilligan, Andrew. "Gaddafi's ghost town after the loyalists retreat". *The Telegraph*. 11 September 2011. Available at: <https://goo.gl/unNTT9>

⁴²⁸ Interview with Tareq, social media activist and translator, 14 February 2015. Oxford.

real material relations; it also communicates meanings' (Friedland and Alford 1991: 246), unchecked military violations by opposition fighters further reinforced the symbolic authority of the *thuwwar* in the revolutionary aesthetic. A report by the television channel Libya Al-Ahrar on the Tawergha situation on 17 August 2011 did not attempt to grapple with the violence committed against Tawergha, and presented only an image of revolutionary benevolence:

*This is the city of Tawergha, which Qadhafi had invaded with his brigades and mercenaries, and turned into a military town that was used to shell civilians in Misurata...Misuratan revolutionaries went into Tawergha to liberate it, and to free its imprisoned residents, supply them what they need and host them kindly.*⁴²⁹

Similarly, the prerogative of the Misuratan *thuwwar* was not challenged in the political sphere, as NTC officials remained largely silent on the subject altogether. Following the displacement of the Tawerghans, the Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril stated that 'regarding Tawergha, my own viewpoint is that nobody has the right to interfere in this matter except the people of Misurata...this is a uniquely Misuratan issue'.⁴³⁰ This response has been ascribed to the NTC's military unimportance in comparison to organised military battalions, and its subsequent inability 'to prevent the realization' of the Misuratan agenda (Sawani 2013: 67). Moreover, the unchallenged authority of Misuratan fighters can be attributed to other factors, such as the way in which the no-fly zone in Libya enabled the emergence of local power structures and militias whose were not part of an overarching military command-and-control structure (Pack 2013b: 8). Such dynamics undoubtedly shaped the material

⁴²⁹ "Report on Tawergha after its liberation". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/kyLMYU>

⁴³⁰ "Mahmoud Jibril on Misurata". YouTube. Available at: <https://goo.gl/LkRsmu>

power of militias during the uprising, but this power was also – I would argue – bolstered by the symbolic construction of the *thuwwar* as blameless actors and prestigious power holders in Libya. This symbolic construction arguably undermines the emergence of political agency, particularly when agency has been conceptualised as resting, in part, on the ability to actively demand political accountability and responsibility from a dominant power (Scott 1990: 51).

Some of the Libyan activists I interviewed actively evaluated the label of *thuwwar*, in light of the refusal of many militias to disband and hand in their weapons to the state following the ouster of Qadhafi: a trend which has since generated a show of opposition to armed militias by Libyan citizens across the country (Khalil 2014: 116). In examining the emergence of the *thuwwar* as a powerful entity in 2011, activists often distinguished between those whom they termed ‘real revolutionaries’ (*al-thuwwar al-haqeeqeyon*) and opportunists or free riders. The lawyer Khaled argued that those who fought against Qadhafi could be split into three ranks: the ‘real *thuwwar*’ who were selfless and nationalistic (*wataney’een*), a secondary rank of individuals who did not fight themselves, but who protected the fighters, and finally, ‘a group of thieves who used religious phrases like “we’ve said God’s name on it [this object]” to steal cars and weapons’, and who ultimately assimilated among the real *thuwwar* when the fighting concluded.⁴³¹

The classification of the *thuwwar* into factions was issued by different activists who travelled to or were present in conflict areas, often with slight variations on the composition of fighters’ ranks. According to the activist Mohammed Ismail, there were ‘people on the front lines who cared about nothing else than freeing Libya and making sure Libya is the best country it can be...and other people discussing how to

⁴³¹ Interview with Khaled, pro-opposition lawyer in Zawiya, 26 March 2015. Tunisia.

divide up the booty'.⁴³² Alternately, it has been argued the 'real *thuwwar*' in 2011 were easy to identify: they were the ones who were either killed in combat, or who immediately gave up their weapons and returned to their former employment after Qadhafi was toppled.⁴³³ The NTC's Hussein looked to the post-revolutionary period, arguing that the *thuwwar* first became a problem in Libya when the interim transitional government of 2012 decided to pay salaries to fighters, at which point their number increased from 25,000 to 250,000, most of whom were falsely claiming to be opposition fighters.⁴³⁴

These arguments demonstrate the ways in which the reified category of *thuwwar* has been problematised following the conclusion of fighting in 2011, but they also attest to an attempt to safeguard the integrity of a core 'revolutionary' group of fighters in 2011. I would argue that Libya's *thuwwar* are not simply problematic because of isolated revolutionary abuses or post-revolutionary opportunism. Winegar (2016: 614-615) has explored the way in which the embodied practices that take place during revolutionary moments expose the underlying tensions, contradictions and ingrained hierarchies behind any purportedly radical and inclusive rhetoric. In this vein, the very creation of 'revolutionaries' and 'martyrs' as categories of power undermined the collectivist rhetoric of the uprising, and legitimised a hierarchical symbolic and material order that began to emerge during the revolutionary period itself.

It is important to note that, in the Libyan uprising, what Winegar has termed the 'radical and inclusive rhetoric' of revolutionary moments did not simply valorise the *thuwwar* and exclude non-revolutionaries, but encompassed broader representations

⁴³² Interview with Umar, journalist and photographer, 14 January 2016. Skype.

⁴³³ Interview with Abdullah, civil society activist in Zawiya, 28 March 2015. Tunisia.

⁴³⁴ Interview with Hussein, NTC representative, 7 November 2016. London.

and celebrations of liberty, justice and collective identity in post-Qadhafi Libya. Why then, did such egalitarian understandings not entirely offset the revolution's more hierarchical symbolic practices? Friedland and Alford (1991: 246) have argued that 'categorical structures only make "sense" when they organize our lives'. In turn, it could be argued that this rhetoric, which was often utopian in tone, did not sufficiently shape, or indeed reflect, the material reality of the political environment during the Libyan uprising. A member of the Benghazi RYC, Mansour, argued that the entrepreneurial and cultural activities occurring in and around the Benghazi Courthouse, as productive and inspiring as they were, ultimately failed to address 'real problems' in the revolutionary order: for instance, the increased autonomy of militias, and the NTC's failure to consult with civil society groups (as formerly promised) prior to issuing the TCD in August 2011. As a result, the Benghazi Courthouse gradually lost its revolutionary appeal:

We just kept hearing the same phrases every night at the Courthouse, whenever speeches would take place. 'Libya was destroyed in 42 years, we will rebuild it in 42 days'. 'What is coming is better'. 'We will soon become like Dubai'. Slogans that meant nothing.⁴³⁵

In this view, the Courthouse transitioned from representing the radical demands of protestors in February 2011, to becoming a site for the repetition of tidy aphorisms and revolutionary clichés that were no longer adequate as statements of political intent. This was fuelled, Mansour argued, by an increasingly pervasive, religious rhetoric that proscribed dissent and disagreement within the opposition's ranks for the purpose of preserving national unity. Ahmed from the Libyan Youth Movement also

⁴³⁵ Interview with Mansour, demonstrator and civil society activist, 20 April 2016. Skype.

expressed frustration with the Benghazi Courthouse, arguing that because of the celebratory atmosphere, ‘all singing and dancing and Libyan music...there was so much love that we were blinded from all the problems we had’.⁴³⁶ The symbolic saturation of the Benghazi Courthouse prevented the emergence of a critical discourse about the utopian revolutionary aesthetic. In turn, the utopian revolutionary aesthetic did not adequately capture or acknowledge discord in the opposition’s ranks, such as conflicts over the role of Islam in Libya’s new political order, and local fears over the marginalisation (*tahmeesh*) of certain cities, regions and identities in Libya (Sawani and Pack 2013).

This interpretation necessitates that we question the claim that revolutionary spaces invite audiences to perpetually address, question and change the status quo (Wahdan 2014: 55), and enable activists to defy the re-imposition of the political and social familiar by cultivating fluidity and contingency (Sabea 2013). Indeed, the RYC argued that the Courthouse had become such a stagnant symbolic space, thoroughly accepting of the new revolutionary consensus surrounding the NTC, that from August 2011 they decided to protest for greater political transparency in front of the NTC headquarters instead. Even then, they argued:

Events like the liberation of Tripoli discomposed us. People kept on saying ‘Why are you protesting against the NTC when everyone is happy with the liberation?’ We suspended demonstrations temporarily, but after that there was no longer the engagement we wanted.⁴³⁷

Within Benghazi, the RYC’s attempts to foster a radical political dialogue were hampered by a nationalist utopian vision that subsumed conflict and contradiction in

⁴³⁶ Interview with Ahmed, social media activist, 25 February 2015. London

⁴³⁷ Interview with Mansour, demonstrator and civil society activist, 20 April 2016. Skype.

Libya into a homogenous narrative of collectivity. Similarly, and outside the Benghazi Courthouse, other activists argued that the nationalist language of the uprising was ‘not fake, but over simplistic’ in its celebration of revolutionary collectivity.⁴³⁸ The fighter Fawzi pointed out the presence of conflicts that were ethnic in nature, such as those between Berber and Zintan fighters, when he travelled to the West of Libya in 2011.⁴³⁹ Similarly, the activist Tareq argued that there were multiple ‘political and military disagreements’ amongst armed anti-Qadhafi factions, with particular frustrations directed against one battalion, the Tripoli Revolutionary Brigade, for avoiding battles while other groups did the fighting.⁴⁴⁰ All of those tensions were concealed in cultural productions that affirmed unity and brotherhood among the *thuwwar*. Ahmed argued that the celebratory rhetoric ultimately led to a glossing over the ‘fault lines that started to appear during the stalemate’:

I believe that we shouldn’t have tried to romanticise things, because it got us into problems. When we said things like “No East, no West”... there was an East, there was a West. We needed to sort it out’.⁴⁴¹

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to examine the emergence of political agency in the Libyan uprising as an articulated practice that contested the dominant symbolic order of Qadhafi’s *Jamahiriya*. It has been argued within the resistance literature that, during radical events, actors manifest agency in the ‘capacity to reinterpret and mobilize an

⁴³⁸ Interview with Marwa, civil society activist in Benghazi, 23 January 2016. London.

⁴³⁹ Interview with Fawzi, revolutionary fighter in western Libya, 29 December 2015. Skype.

⁴⁴⁰ Interview with Tareq, social media activist and translator, 14 February 2015. Oxford.

⁴⁴¹ Interview with Ahmed, social media activist, 25 February 2015. London

array of resources in terms of cultural schemas other than those that initially constituted the array' (Sewell 1992: 19). In particular, it has been argued that the removal of authoritarian constraints in Libya meant that, in artistic terms, the individual was 'free to renegotiate her relationship to the social space in which she was previously dominated' (Caster 2011).

The preceding discussion has explored this 'renegotiated' relationship by examining both the subversive and transformational dimensions of symbolic resistance in the Libyan uprising. It has argued that, through openly contentious articulation, Libyans dismantled the *Jamahiriya*'s idealised and unaccountable self-presentation, and in doing so publically proclaimed their own identities as autonomous agents, and as unwilling and unbelieving participants in the *Jamahiriya*'s institutional logic. They attempted to renegotiate their relationship to public space through the instatement of new social relations and organisational behaviours, underpinned by a conceptualisation of citizenship and national belonging that celebrated individual and collective responsibility.

However, in reflecting on the new hierarchies created within the uprising's alternative symbolic order, the chapter problematises the claim that revolutionary cultural productions signify a radical articulation of 'diversity and defiance' (Wahdan 2014: 64). Thus, it has been argued that 'utopian schemes are always exclusionary' (Winegar 2016: 620) because they stem from, and reflect, the particular aspirations, interests and contradictions of those performing them. Libyans transformed the content of the 'cultural schemas' deployed by the Qadhafi regime, but not necessarily the way in which those schemas structured and defended power and interest in Libya. The uprising's practices of categorisation led to the creation of a 'legitimate vision of the social world' (Bourdieu 1991: 20) that centred on the reification of the 17

February 2011 uprising itself, in place of Qadhafi's 1969 coup and the *Jamahiriyah*, and that foregrounded a notion of revolutionary belonging and status that was dependent on the political allegiances and beliefs of Libyans, and that struggled to genuinely accommodate diversity despite its proclaimed egalitarian aesthetic.

In presenting this argument, I go beyond the idea that solidarities only disintegrate after radical events, 'once the common enemy is gone' (Gamson 2011: 468). Instead, the agentive, emancipatory symbolic interactions that occur in the most radical of spaces and moments, are themselves circumscribed by, reveal and engender social inequalities and material interests.

Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

In the aftermath of the ‘Arab Spring’, political agency emerged as a focal point of enquiry in the Middle East politics literature. It was argued that the advent of highly visible acts of popular contestation, from December 2010, signified that the Arab people had shrugged off or defied the mantle of political apathy (Pollack 2011a; Cavatorta and Pace 2012; Dabashi 2012; Ramadan 2012; Achcar 2013; Dawisha 2013), and in doing so, had successfully undermined dominant authoritarian structures of rule. When it became evident that mass protests had failed to produce democracy, except in Tunisia, the Arab uprisings were said to have yielded a ‘depressingly modest harvest’ (Brownlee et al 2015: 5). However, the thesis revisits and attempts to make sense of the new mode of ‘political actorness’ (Marchetti 2013: 1) that the Arab uprisings had purportedly engendered. This orientation aligns with a longstanding, scholarly tradition of investigating political engagement in the Middle East outside of formal political contexts, and beyond the authoritarianism-democratisation binary (Singerman 1995; Alhamad 2008; Bayat 2010; Beinín and Vairel 2011; Khatib 2013b; Tripp 2013; Chalcraft 2016).

This thesis positions itself within the nexus of the literatures on Middle East authoritarianism, social movement theory and resistance. It sets out to understand the way in which political agency emerged in the form of discursive claims making

practices during the Arab uprisings. It also seeks to situate this contentious activity in relation to existent authoritarian structures of power and meaning. The overarching research question is:

How, and to what extent, did open insubordination in the Arab Spring transform authoritarian structures of domination and generate new political subjectivities?

The thesis investigates this query in relation to the understudied case of Libya: a country that experienced a particularly repressive form of authoritarian rule under Muammar al-Qadhafi's *Jamahiriya* ('State of the Masses'), but which also witnessed mass public demonstrations and a militarised struggle against the regime in 2011, in what was popularly labelled the 17 February Revolution. This research question, which posits a need to understand both structure and agency, is lent clarity through a theoretical framework that integrates an institutional understanding of political power with a conceptualisation of agency as a strategic and symbolic representational practice. In turn, this framework is operationalised by an interpretive methodology that examines Qadhafi's *Jamahiriya* as an institution, and analyses the strategic and symbolic discourses of Libyans in 2011 as a contentious response to the *Jamahiriya*'s institutional logic.

The thesis develops two interrelated arguments. Firstly, it argues that representational practices in the Libyan uprising challenged the cultural schemas and the terms of discursive engagement established by the *Jamahiriya*. Strategic meaning making practices, exemplified in the creation of collective action frames, sought to mobilise opposition to the Qadhafi regime, selectively resonating with particular meanings in the *Jamahiriya*'s institutional logic in order to do so. Expressive meaning

making practices subverted the Qadhafi regime's symbolic order and constructed alternative understandings of Libyan political identity, collectivity and citizenship. Through their representational practices, Libyans attempted to actively redefine the way in which power and interest operated in Libya. Political agency thus shifted from being an 'embedded' or 'partial' form of autonomy (Thornton and Ocasio 2008: 104), in which Libyan citizens were complicit in reproducing the *Jamahiriya*'s symbolic and material dominance, to an openly, contentious mode of activity, in which the *Jamahiriya*'s monopoly over meaning, and its exclusionary definition of national membership, was actively subverted.

However, the thesis also argues that the practice of contentious articulation remained bound up with the logics and imperatives of collective action, and with the structural configurations of the *Jamahiriya*'s institutional order, if not with its symbolic content. Strategic meaning making practices rested upon the obfuscation and deferral of differences, problematic understandings and tensions within the revolutionary narrative for the pursuit of short-term political objectives. In turn, symbolic contestation saw the propounding of a utopian nationalistic narrative that proclaimed inclusivity, but in fact created a hierarchy of power and prestige that rested on participation in and loyalty to the 17 February uprising, instead of allegiance to the *Jamahiriya* and to Qadhafi's 1969 revolution. Meaning making practices thus engaged with, challenged and even reversed the *Jamahiriya*'s symbolic order, but did not entirely transform it. Articulation was not boundless, involving a Libyan people 'saying what it wants, whenever it wants' within a radical revolutionary space (Bell 2013), but empirically constrained and revealing of new systemic inequalities.

This problematised understanding of political agency is partly foregrounded by the theoretical framework of the thesis. In line with critical perspectives on resistance,

I do not take for granted that meaning making practices are necessarily transformative of power paradigms. Instead, in Chapter 7, I actively demarcate the inextricable ‘entanglements’ (Sharp et al 2000) of resistance and power in the Libyan uprising. In addition, the thesis also amplifies latent tensions within constructivist social movement theory: namely, the ambiguity over the extent to which the strategic imperatives of collective action can undermine meaning making processes. This tension partly arises due to the very nature of strategic framing, which involves what has been described as a ‘cynical’ or ‘marketing orientation’ (Noakes and Johnston 2005: 13), in which political actors choose what to exclude, as well as include, in order to maximise the instrumental impact of their narratives. During the Libyan uprising, this practice engendered a simplified and authoritative presentation of reality that undercut the radical multiplicity of revolutionary meanings. In addition, the thesis’ effort to understand framing as a ‘processual phenomenon’ (Benford and Snow 2000: 614) entailed a recognition that cynical framing activities, and the long-term trajectories of contentious action, shape actors’ retrospective assessments of their own political agency.

The thesis also positions this problematised understanding of agency in light of the symbolic legacy of Qadhafi’s *Jamahiriya*. Prior to and throughout the Libyan uprising, the Qadhafi regime continued to construct a binary and incommensurate vision of political reality in Libya: one in which Libyans were the sole decision-makers in a purportedly egalitarian political system, and in which the opposition movement’s ranks consisted of manipulated youth, Islamist terrorists and self-interested political dissidents. Libyan activists thus responded to the Qadhafi regime’s rhetoric by contradicting its allegations outright. Qadhafi and his immediate circle were framed as the only accountable political actors in Libya, thereby hindering the

emergence of a more challenging narrative of the way in which the *Jamahiriya*'s institutional-administrative system had engendered complicity and propagated social injustices. In turn, Libyan activists also knowingly denied or sidelined the presence of extreme elements among the ranks of revolutionary fighters, and asserted that – contrary to Qadhafi's attempts to instigate division (*fitna*) - the Libyan nation was fully unified and even homogenous in its political and social outlook. Moreover, the system of meaning developed by Libyans was particularly bound up with the Qadhafi regime's well-established rhetoric of 'revolution', participating in its terms and concepts, and reversing its binary political categorisation of Libyan society. As a result, the 'event' (Sewell 1996) of radical, open contestation in Libya did not generate unfettered representational practices, but meanings that were constrained by the semiotic, political and contentious contexts in which they emerged.

This final chapter will revisit the theoretical and empirical contributions made by each respective chapter in the process of furthering the above conclusion. It will then outline the implications of the conclusion for the bodies of literature with which this thesis engages: principally, the Middle East politics literature and social movement theory. Finally, it will delineate the limitations of the study and indicate promising avenues of research that can build on its strengths and address some of its shortcomings.

8.2 Core Arguments

The Introduction posited that the unfolding politics of the Middle East, following the 'Arab Spring', present a challenging juncture for understanding political agency in the region. The Arab uprisings appeared to signal the emergence of new models of political actorness, but subsequent 'authoritarian retrenchment' (Lynch 2014: 314) has

rendered it difficult to offer a coherent appraisal of contentious politics in the region, particularly through the use of democratisation frameworks. In addition, the unforeseen instability wrought by the Arab uprisings has drawn attention to the shortage of scholarship on contentious activism in Middle East countries: a deficiency that is particularly magnified in a formerly closed, authoritarian country such as Libya.

Following the 17 February uprising, there has been a great deal of scholarly engagement with the politics of Libya, much of which has sought to analyse the process of post-Qadhafi state building, and to account for the new dynamics of elite competition, tribal factionalism and military unrest (Lacher 2013a; Pack 2013a; Sawani 2013; Sawani and Pack 2013; Varvelli 2013; Sawani 2014; Cole and McQuinn 2015; Randall 2015; Strakes 2017; Willcoxon 2017). This approach is valuable in its contextualisation of the Libyan uprising, and of the cleavages generated by the civil war, but it does not actively address or unpack the popular, discursive claims making practices that emerged during the uprising. The thesis returns to the radical moment of open contestation itself, in order to understand the way in which contentious representational practices emerged, engaged with and potentially transformed authoritarianism and political agency in what was formerly described as a ‘depoliticized’ society (Vandewalle 2006: 71).

Chapter 2 reviews the way in which the Middle East politics literature has examined the relationship between political agency and authoritarianism, and positions the thesis’ research question within its extant gaps. The literature prior to the Arab uprisings is theoretically diverse. Studies on authoritarian resilience examined the behaviour of ruling elites and their use of conflict management instruments in order to sustain their rule (Gershenson and Grossman 2001; Bellin 2004; Gandhi and

Przeworski 2006; Gandhi 2008; Svolik 2009), while a parallel literature on Middle East politics focused on informal, everyday acts of political participation (Singer 1995; Hoodfar 1997; Bayat 2010; Beinín and Vairel 2011). Both literatures ultimately circumscribe the agency of political actors, viewing such agency as shaped and even determined by authoritarian structures. The Arab uprisings shifted the terms of debate, suggesting that Arab publics had engaged in a radical, collective and articulated mode of contestation, and had thereby succeeded in challenging the hegemony of authoritarianism (Affaya 2011; Brynen et al 2012; Bell 2013; Dawisha 2013; Tripp 2013). The chapter identifies two central gaps in this literature: the need for a more direct engagement with the way in which authoritarian regimes structure meanings and are constitutive of popular agency, and the need to understand the extent to which this dynamic is transformed during moments of open contestation, and through the emergence of meaning making practices in particular.

Chapter 3 engages critically with theories that have attempted to understand the relationship between structures of power and contentious political agency and resistance, before ultimately outlining a theoretical framework that draws these complementary approaches together. Using multi-institutional politics theory (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008), it understands dominant configurations of power as ‘institutions’ that are comprised of a system of meaning and a material ordering of reality, or an ‘institutional logic’ (Friedland and Alford 1991; Thornton and Ocasio 2008). This logic is constitutive of the publically political subjectivities of social actors. In turn, it draws on social movement and resistance theories in order to understand the emergence of political agency in moments of open contestation as an instrumental and symbolic representational practice that undertakes the alteration of this dominant institutional configuration.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological premises underpinning the operationalisation of the research question. It emphasises the relevance of Qadhafi's *Jamahiriya* as a case study for understanding institutional domination and change. It then goes on to outline the triangulated research methods that enabled the study of strategic and symbolic meaning making practices during the Libyan uprising. It also presents the interpretive methodology through which such practices were read as expressions of a contentious, representational form of political agency.

The thesis is comprised of three empirical chapters, each of which develops an individual sub-argument that contributes to the overarching conclusion made by the thesis. The central contribution of Chapter 5 is in taking Qadhafi's *Jamahiriya* seriously as an 'institution' that was constitutive of publically political agency in Libya, as opposed to analysing the *Jamahiriya* as a de-institutionalised 'sultanistic regime' (Chehabi and Linz 1998) or as an increasingly 'liberalized autocracy' (Brumberg 2002). It argues that Qadhafi's *Jamahiriya* structured material and symbolic reality in Libya through an 'institutional logic' that mandated the popular performance of contradiction in the pursuit of individual and collective interests, and that was reproduced across a set of coercive, political and symbolic practices. There were multiple contradictions sustained within and by the *Jamahiriya*: in particular, the tension between its promotion of popular self-representation through a system of congresses and committees, and its refusal to permit such representational practices the capacity to shape the material reality of Libyan society. In addition, the *Jamahiriya*'s valorised self-presentation was perpetuated and sustained through the public re-performance of its symbolism, despite a widespread recognition of its material failings. This institutional logic ultimately delimited political agency: firstly, by engendering complicity in the *Jamahiriya*'s coercive and institutional-

administrative system, and secondly, by preventing the emergence of authentic, publically political subjectivities.

Chapters 6 and 7 of the thesis address the strategic and semiotic components of meaning making in the Libyan uprising. They do this by delineating the way in which political actors generated representations of reality that responded to the *Jamahiriya*'s institutional logic and to the imperatives of contentious collective action. Chapter 6 outlines the 'collective action framing' of the Libyan uprising. It describes the actors and networks responsible for disseminating authoritative understandings of the revolutionary moment, as well as the discursive content of their frames. In turn, it argues that the rhetorical emphasis on Qadhafi's culpability, appeals for the necessity of a no-fly zone, and religious vocabularies of struggle, together constituted powerful diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames for collective mobilisation. However, it also argues that these widely disseminated frames were articulated despite the presence of palpable differences and divergent views of the revolutionary narrative. As a result, the framing process rested as much on the obfuscation of meanings and interpretations as it did on their clarification and refinement. This conclusion problematises the emergence of political agency in the Libyan uprising, by challenging the assumed complementarity between strategic, contentious action and the social construction of reality.

Chapter 7 unpacks the symbolic, representational practices that emerged during the Libyan uprising, particularly in the burgeoning sphere of cultural production. It argues that through such cultural productions – from revolutionary sloganeering to music, poetry and artwork - political actors displayed agency through subversive resistance: they contested Qadhafi's monopoly over meaning and over public space by dismantling the *Jamahiriya*'s idealised self-presentation, and by enacting a

revolutionary aesthetic that positioned Libyans as productive citizens and self-determining agents. However, in the process of contesting the *Jamahiriya*'s symbolic order, Libyan propounded a utopian nationalist rhetoric that redrew fresh boundaries of exclusion, and they constructed new symbolic and material hierarchies that centred on commitment to, and involvement in, the 17 February uprising. As a result, their representational practices struggled to transform the *Jamahiriya*'s dominant symbolic classifications of the social world.

8.3 Implications for Middle East Politics

This thesis, in emphasising an institutional understanding of authoritarian regimes, has implications for the way in which political agency and authoritarianism are studied in Middle East politics. As argued in Chapters 2 and 5, the 'institutions' that are judged to be relevant in authoritarian regimes are those such as legislatures, political parties and security apparatuses, which are deemed significant primarily because they act as pseudo-democratic instruments, used by dictators for co-optation and control (Gandhi 2008). In contrast, this thesis suggests that an institutional conceptualisation of authoritarian regimes is useful for understanding, both the way in which structural power operates, and the way in which it shapes the political agency of citizens.

In the former sense, authoritarian domination can be understood as comprised of material and symbolic practices that are closely interrelated: definitions, categorisations and visual enactments of power and interest are bolstered by, and further entrench, dominant material practices. This interplay between classificatory systems and material practices creates a logic of practice, or a culture of domination, that is 'formidably powerful' (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008: 83), but one that can

only be delineated if this interrelationship is grasped. A recent contribution to understanding the symbolic mechanisms of authoritarian regimes is offered by Joseph Sassooun (2016), but this disaggregates and studies authoritarian regimes as comprised of separate ‘institutional’ and ‘cult of personality’ elements: the former dictate norms of political, organisational and social behaviour, and the latter construct symbols and systems of meaning centred on a particular leader. By understanding meaning as constitutive of structure, we can broaden the way in which classificatory systems are analysed in authoritarian regimes, going beyond the notion of a ‘cult of personality’, and examining the way in which regimes define power and interest in general. In turn, we can analyse moments of contentious action, such as the Arab uprisings, as attempts at institutional transformation. In doing so, challenges to material structures of domination can be viewed as most radical when they are accompanied by changes to a dominant system of meaning.

In addition, an institutional approach to authoritarianism can enable a more nuanced conceptualisation of the way in which dominant representational practices subsequently inform the behaviours, patterns of social conduct and subjectivities of citizens. In Chapter 2, this is identified as a gap in the literature on Middle East politics, which has largely grappled with authoritarian systems of meaning by invoking concepts such as ‘legitimation’ (Gerschewski 2013; Kailitiz 2013), or by seeing discursive structures as determinant and constitutive of political agents (Mitchell 1988; Massad 2001; El Shakry 2007). There is a need to build more substantively on the work of Wedeen (1999) by investigating the way in which authoritarian regimes regulate symbols while never fully claiming ownership of their meanings, or indeed, of the popular political subjectivities that reproduce such meanings through acts of dissimulation. In this view, dominant systems of meaning

are not entirely constitutive of political agents, but create what has been described as an embedded form of agency that publically reproduces domination while remaining detached from its legitimising narratives.

In seeking to understand the way in which regimes shape publically political subjectivities, the thesis has also drawn attention to the concept of ‘complicity’. Wedeen (1999: 6) has argued that authoritarian system induce complicity by creating practices in which citizens themselves uphold the symbolic norms constitutive of domination. In Chapter 5, the thesis suggests that complicity did not simply emerge due to the re-enactment of symbolic domination in Libya, but also as a result of popular participation in Libya’s ineffectual, unscrupulous and distributive public institutions. In the Middle East literature, this understanding of complicity is alluded to in the argument that wealth distribution schemes in the Arab world – particularly in so-called ‘rentier states’ - create powerful vested interests in society (Hertog 2016), leading to an acceptance of the misuse of public funds (Hafez 2009: 467), ‘internalised corruption’ (Jabbra 1989: 4), and ultimately, in the case of Libya, to a devastating ‘culture of entitlement’ (St. John 2013: 94). The emergent conclusion from such observations is that Arab countries are in need of a new ‘social contract’, or a ‘new institutional framework where the role of the state and its relationship with society is entirely revamped’ (Rother and Devarajan 2015: 38).

This is a promising line of research, but it has been noted that discussions of what such a social contract would involve remain vague and, as yet, underdeveloped (Hertog 2016). Moreover, the central concept of ‘complicity’ can be usefully extended to include the way in which routinised, exploitable systems of material gain shape the political subjectivities of those who participate within them. As argued in Chapters 6 and 7, the *Jamahiriya*’s representation of citizens as ‘accomplices’ shaped

the attributional rhetoric of Libyans during moments of open contestation, rendering it difficult for Libyans to acknowledge and disentangle their own agency from the greater accountability of dominant authoritarian structures.

Lastly, the conclusion of the thesis challenges the prevailing analysis of cultural production in the Middle East as an empowering and agentive activity (Armbrust 2013; Khatib 2013a; Sabea 2013, 2014; Wahdan 2014), and as part of a radical politics of resistance that, during the Arab uprisings, opened up ‘a space for the possibility of debate and critical engagement with power’ (Tripp 2013: 308). Indeed, this binary between power and resistance is mirrored in actor-centric accounts of post-Arab uprising politics that go beyond cultural production: for instance, in the neat contrast between ‘civil resistance’ and ‘oppression and autocracy’ (Roberts 2016: 271), and in the argument that contentious publics in Arab Spring countries couldn’t change ‘political culture’ principally because of the ‘exclusionary attitudes and confrontational strategies’ of old and new political elites (Asseburg and Wimmen 2016: 16). Jessica Winegar (2016) has argued convincingly for the need to grasp the way in which revolutionary actions, such as collective acts of ‘aesthetic ordering’ and the reclamation of formerly threatening public spaces, reveal contradictions at the heart of utopian revolutionary narratives and further inscribe the interests of those who perform them. Chapter 7 builds on this view of power and resistance by connecting material acts of aesthetic ordering in the Libyan uprising with the definitional aesthetics of protest, instead of viewing them, as Winegar does, as separate spheres of discourse and practice. Foregrounding this understanding of collective political action also means going beyond the argument that activism is informed by changing political contexts (Khatib and Lust 2014), and examining the way in which it is informed by dominant semiotic contexts also.

8.4 Implications for Social Movement Theory

This thesis deploys the conceptual tools of constructivist social movement theory in order to advance its analysis of political agency as a strategic, articulated practice. The concept of collective action framing has provided a useful, structured template for unpacking the components of discursive mobilisation during contentious action. However, the deployment of social movement theory has revealed some difficulties in the way it permits – or does not permit – us to understand political agency and symbolic contestation in authoritarian contexts, partly stemming from the fact it remains ‘necessarily drawn from the experience of particular social movements in particular places’ (Foweraker 1997: 64).

The concept of ‘frame resonance’ (Snow and Benford 1986) is particularly problematic as a tool for analysing the way in which meaning making practices should both affirm and contest dominant cultural norms. As outlined in Chapter 3, frame resonance refers to the notion that the understandings disseminated by social movement actors must connect with wider societal values and beliefs in order to be sufficiently persuasive. The argument that culture is a beneficial ‘resource’ for political activists (Johnston 2009: 6) implicitly presumes that cultures are undergirded by democratic and progressive beliefs that social movements should simply unearth, amplify and make relevant once more to societies that hold them in high regard. However, if democratic understandings are not pre-existent within society, or at the very least, do not proliferate at a widespread level, then on what basis can social movement activists construct both politically progressive and socially resonant frames of meaning? Chapter 6 argues that ‘democracy’ was framed as a malleable signifier in the Libyan uprising, and suggests that frame resonance with the *Jamahiriya*’s meanings was problematic. Framing theory is premised on the notion that social

movements generate support by continually articulating, clarifying and fine-tuning their perspectives. In contrast, this thesis suggests the need to consider what is left purposefully unarticulated and unspoken by political actors in their attempt to advance their political objectives.

One way of stepping beyond this authoritarian impasse is to circumscribe the empirical reach of frame resonance. Conceptions of frame resonance are targeted towards understanding ‘societal values’ in a broad sense, and generalising those values across social movement participants, audiences and bystanders. Instead, it may be more fruitful to investigate, from the outset, the values and beliefs that are resonant within particular institutional contexts. This thesis focuses on authoritarian institutional contexts of meaning, but it is also possible to examine frame resonance as occurring, to varying degrees, within the myriad of overlapping ‘institutions’ that exist within a particular social context. ‘Societal understandings’ can thus be disaggregated and analysed according to the meanings that they contain, before investigating the way in which such understandings are unearthed and amplified in movement discourses.

The thesis has also drawn attention to the way in which the semiotic tools of social movement theory remain particularly underdeveloped: a limitation that necessitated the use of resistance theory as a complementary conceptual framework. Prominent voices in the field of contentious politics, such as Sidney Tarrow (1993a: 286) have spoken of the way in which protest events produce ‘new or transformed symbols, frames of meaning, and ideologies’. Attention to the transformation of symbols has been depicted as one of the distinguishing characteristics of framing theory, setting it apart from structuralist understandings of collective action (McAdam et al 1996). However, framing analysis is not designed for the investigation of

‘symbols’ as semiotic practices. Instead, symbols are often conflated with cognitive collective action frames, and ultimately disaggregated as a means to an end: the justification and mobilisation of collective action. Symbols thus remain epiphenomenal to the applied practice of framing research, despite constituting part of its underlying theoretical approach.

The relative neglect of symbols is visible in the conflict between the stated objective and rationale of framing analysis, and the presentation of framing outcomes. Constructivist social movement theory argues that political actors can engender interpretive shifts in the perceptions, values and beliefs of society through their framing practices (Snow and Benford 1986; Benford and Snow 2000). However, the findings of frame analysis are often presented through the lens of mobilisation: frame alignment processes are judged successful based on whether or not they succeed in getting people to mobilise, not on whether they have actually succeeded in aligning, extending or transforming the self-understandings of participants (Snow and Benford 1988; Zald 1996; Johnston 2002; Noakes and Johnston 2005; Westby 2005; Doerr et al 2015; Polletta and Gardner 2015). Thus, despite its constructivist underpinnings, frame analysis tends to adopt a stance of positivistic impact, presenting causal findings about the way in which framing processes shape social movement outcomes.

To offer one example, the concept of ‘frame bridging’ (Snow et al 1986: 467) reveals the limitation of understanding the social construction of reality principally as a means to mobilisation. Frame bridging processes purportedly incentivise bystanders to participate in social movements by creating parallel, appealing benefits that exist outside of the core objectives of the movement, but which chime with the interests of individuals. These benefits serve to ‘hook’ individuals into a social movement environment, and to gradually mobilise them into action once their interest is retained.

And yet, it is not at all self-evident that this bridging process will ultimately contribute to the alignment of the individual with the core values and beliefs of the social movement. In fact, the presentation of tailored incentives may keep actors tangentially aligned with a movement, without necessitating that they embrace its holistic objectives and goals. Thus, Chapter 6 of the thesis argues that what has been described as social movement ‘cynicism’ may be an asset for drawing in participants, but it can also undermine the heterogeneity and multiplicity of representational practices – the very foundation on which agency rests – and create a fragile consensus that ultimately undercuts the collectivist ambitions of a social movement. As a whole, there could be a theoretical consideration of the way in which framing processes can increasingly distort the central veracity of a movement’s self-understandings, drawing it further away from its core values in the pursuit of its mobilising objectives.

The purpose of this discussion has not been to suggest that framing theory abandon its mobilising dimensions altogether. On the contrary, this dimension of framing theory has proven useful in unpacking the strategic component of rhetorical contestation in the Libyan uprising. However, it does suggest a need for framing theory to focus on the interpretive component of framing processes, and to develop its own ‘in-house’ mechanisms for gauging the transformative, semiotic impact of frame alignment. This would bolster framing theory’s stated commitment towards advancing a constructivist and agency-centric understanding of social movements.

8.5 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The subject of political agency under authoritarianism is vast, and cannot be comprehensively addressed in a research project of this scale. The thesis attempted to delimit a specific, discursive understanding of political agency that could be investigated within a relatively self-contained moment of contentious political activism. However, this decision to narrow the scope of research has undoubtedly led to limitations in the empirical content of the study, and in its temporal scope. It has been a particular frustration of this research project that I was unable to travel to Libya to conduct fieldwork, due to the deteriorating security situation from August 2014 onwards. For instance, a more spontaneous approach to interviewing - one that would have emerged organically from being located inside Libya - would have greatly enriched the empirical content of the thesis, particularly in unpacking the *Jamahiriya*'s institutional logic. Symbolic meanings are not only gleaned through spoken and written discourses (although these are undoubtedly valuable resources), but are actively constructed and negotiated through conversational interactions and rituals within a particular social context.

Moreover, the thesis focuses only one type of institutional structure, but it also recognises that there is a multiplicity of institutions that could have been examined in tandem: for instance, family, religion, and tribalism. A focus on representational practices within tribal systems of meaning, for instance, may have generated a different conclusion regarding the way in which the Libyan uprising fostered primordial identities or empowered actors within local, rather than national, contexts. Moreover, in solely examining the *Jamahiriya* as an institution, the thesis confines itself to examining intra-institutional tensions and contradictions within its logic of practice. However, Friedland and Alford (1991: 255) argue that 'the sources of change and resistance within institutions are just as likely to be found in the

contradictions between them’, and that people can ‘export the symbols and practices of one institution in order to transform another’. The presence of inter-institutional contradiction in the Libyan uprising remains an untapped avenue of research, but one that would have involved unpacking the semiotic content and material practices of other, concomitant institutions in Libya before tracing the extent to which their meanings resurfaced through contentious framing practices.

In terms of its temporal scope, the thesis consciously restricts itself to examining the contentious period of the 2011 Libyan uprising, stemming from the theoretical emphasis on historical ‘events’ as unprecedented moments of political activity (Sewell 1996). However, a consequence of this choice is that it has been difficult to speak authoritatively about the degree of institutional transformation engendered by the uprising, if transformation is understood as the extent to which individuals create ‘new truths, new models by which to understand themselves and their societies, as well as new forms of behaviour and material practices’ (Friedland and Alford 1991: 254).

For instance, although Chapter 7 indicated that the revolutionary period did not entirely transform the *Jamahiriya*’s material practices, and may in fact have engendered further systemic inequalities, this phenomenon arguably became most evident following the removal of the Qadhafi regime. Interim transitional governments in Libya perpetuated the Qadhafi regime’s distributive proclivities through cash giveaways and state subsidies, particularly to revolutionary fighters (*thuwwar*) and to the families of fighters who were killed or missing in action (St. John 2015: 125). In May 2012, the NTC also passed legislation punishing anyone harming ‘the 17 February revolution’ or engaging in the ‘glorification’ of Qadhafi, while granting amnesty to *thuwwar* for ‘any acts made necessary by the 17 February

revolution’ (LFJL 2012; Kersten 2016). Such practices entrenched the interests and powers of *thuwwar* in post-uprising Libya, and institutionalised an exclusionary understanding of the 17 February uprising that undercut multiplicity and did not tolerate dissent. Although the thesis does not investigate the post-2011 period of political transition, such a focus would have undoubtedly enabled a richer discussion of institutional change and continuity in Libya.

Finally, the thesis suggests a need to examine, in more depth, the shifting narrations and reinterpretations of contentious activism in Libya. As indicated above, such reinterpretations occur at a subjective level, as Libyans continue to reassess the impact and significance of their involvement in the 2011 uprising based on the intensification of political divisions, continuing insecurity and the deterioration of infrastructure in the country. In the East of Libya there have been successive killings of high profile activists, lawyers and political figures; throughout the country, the ongoing conflict has been accompanied by inflation, rising food prices, water shortages and endemic electricity cuts. Chapter 6 briefly indicated the way in which these deleterious outcomes have begun to spawn a trend of revolutionary disavowal and the emergence of conspiratorial readings of 17 February that stress the preeminent role of foreign interests and political elites, as opposed to the empowering vision of collective political agency generated during the revolutionary period. However, there is scope to extend this discussion more substantively, in order to understand the way in which the contextual trajectories of social movements shape the persistence and transformation of personal political involvement.

These mutable conceptualisations of the Libyan uprising are important, partly for what they tell us about individual subjectivities, but also for the way in which they represent a broader struggle for the categorisation and delimitation of the

revolutionary experience as a whole. This phenomenon can be witnessed within the broader Arab Spring landscape, in conflicting accounts of whether or not the revolutions ‘achieved anything’. In Libya, this interpretive process can be studied as a symptom of the divergent local and regional experiences of the ongoing civil conflict. The 17 February revolutionary narrative, which has constituted the subject of this thesis, has to some extent been jettisoned in favour of alternative histories of struggle that are now equally if not more salient to their participants. The battles between ‘Karama’ (Operation Dignity) in the East of Libya, and the ‘Fajr’ (Dawn of Libya) coalition in the West, from 2014, have generated new symbols, values and martyrs for an increasingly fragmented revolutionary cause. Within the policy literature, this conflict is wrapped within a language of ‘Islamism’ vs. ‘secularism’, when in reality it reflects the breakdown of authority in the periphery of the Libyan state. Building on the constructivist orientation of this thesis, it would be fruitful to research the ongoing Libyan conflict, not simply as a battle between militias, tribes and political bodies, but as a heterogeneous process of historical revision and re-interpretation, embodied in the competing local, regional and national narratives that are being disseminated across Libyan society, and which continue the practice of defining Libyan identity anew.

Appendix I Images and Graffiti

Figure 1



Stuart Aiken

Figure 2



Stuart Aiken

Figure 3



Khadija Teri

Figure 4



Khadija Teri

Figure 5



Soumiea Abushagur

Figure 6



Mark Kersten

Figure 7



Mark Kersten

Figure 8



Rory Mulholland

Figure 9



C.J. Chivers

Figure 10



Khadija Teri

Figure 11



C.J. Chivers

Figure 12



Mark Kersten

Figure 13



C.J. Chivers

Figure 14



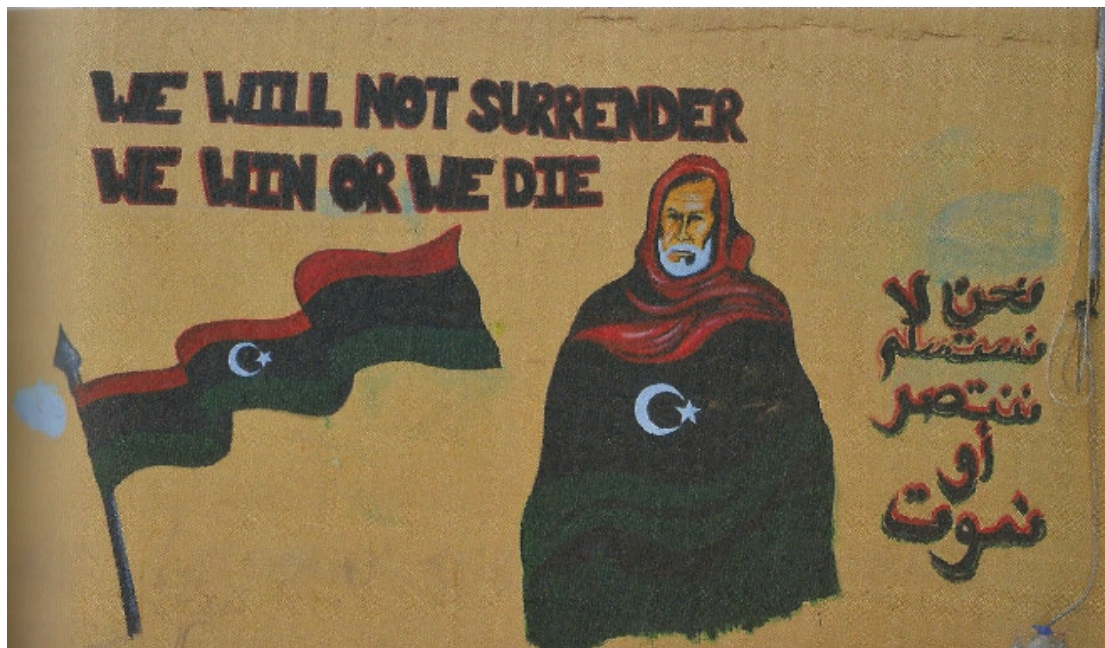
Soumiea Abushagur

Figure 15



C.J. Chivers

Figure 16



Soumiea Abushagur

Figure 17



Mark Kersten

Figure 18



Associated Press.

Appendix II List of Interviews

	Name	Date Interviewed	Location
1	Maryam	03/02/2015	Skype
2	Munir	08/02/2015	Skype
3	Ali	09/02/2015	Skype
4	Tareq	14/02/2015	Oxford
5	Ahmed	25/02/2015	London
6	Mustafa	04/03/2015	London
7	Bushra	04/03/2015	London
8	Yasmin	11/03/2015	Exeter
9	Reem	15/03/2015	Skype
10	Mohammed	23/03/2015	Tunisia
11	Sara	24/03/2015	Tunisia
12	Khaled	26/03/2015	Tunisia
13	Abdullah	28/03/2015	Tunisia
14	Haleema	29/03/2015	Tunisia
15	Hamza	04/04/2015	London
16	Muna	20/08/2015	Bristol
17	Dania	27/08/2015	London
18	Fawzi	29/12/2015	Skype
19	Najib	30/12/2015	Skype
20	Osama	30/12/2015	Skype
21	Umar	14/01/2016	Skype
22	Marwa	23/01/2016	London
23	Fayez	27/01/2016	London
24	Isa	25/01/2016	Skype
25	Aisha	06/04/2016	Skype
26	Mansour	20/04/2016	Skype
27	Huda	09/06/2016	Skype
28	Hussein	07/11/2016	Milton
29	Yahya	29/11/2016	Skype
30	Hisham	05/12/2016	Skype
31	Salem	10/12/2016	Birmingham

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